

Thos. Band 15
The THIRD and LAST

LETTER

To a Gentleman Dissenting from the
CHURCH of *ENGLAND*;

WHEREIN

The Design of the Second (which was to refute the great and popular Objections of Dissenters against Communion with the Church of *England*, and to reflect them back upon themselves) is farther pursued, and completed.

To which is added,

AN APPENDIX,

Containing some CONSIDERATIONS on the Lawfulness, Expediency, and Necessity of requiring all who are to be admitted to the Ministry, or to any Ecclesiastical Preference in the Church of *England*, or to be Preachers or Teachers in any Dissenting Congregation, to subscribe the Articles of Faith and Religion; and setting forth the Inconsistencies between the notorious *Practices* of Dissenters, and the avowed *Principles* of many of them touching that Matter.

By JOHN WHITE, B. D.
Sometime Fellow of St. *John's* College, Cambridge. *K*

Nolo tale certamen adeas, in quo tantum te protegas, et, torpente dextera, sinistra clypeum circumferas. HIERON.

THE THIRD EDITION.

L O N D O N,

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William May

The THIRD and LAST
L E T T E R
C O N C E R N I N G

The Popular Pleas of DISSENTERS.

S I R,

WHEN I was making an End of my former Letter to you, I let you know, you was to look for a *third* Address; and I am now sitting down, to acquit myself of my *Promise*, or *Menace*, shall I call it. For I can easily believe, I have already sufficiently exercised your Patience with my two former Letters, which were, indeed, extended to a Length I did not foresee at the Beginning of them, not imagining, then, I should have had so much to say to you, as, afterwards, when my Mind was a little warmed with thinking, I found I had. But, now, I will endeavour to be shorter, proportioning the Load I am imposing upon you, to that Measure of Patience, which I can hope you have *yet left* to bear it.

Doubtless, you remember, that, towards the Conclusion of my former Letter, I was vindicating the Practice of the Church of *England* in *kneeling* at the Lord's Table, and retorting the Charge of Imposition, which you bring against it, on that Account; from whence Occasion was taken for some Natural Reflections upon the general Practice of your Congregations, in the *avoidance* of *kneeling*, and always chusing to *stand* at your *Common-Prayer*.—

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I now directly proceed to another of our Impositions, as you are pleased to call them, to wit, *the Sign of the Cross* at Baptism, which you complain as grievously of, and as immeasurably decry, as the fore-mentioned; *First*, merely as a Ceremony, which the Church (you say) has no Authority to ordain; but more, *Secondly*, as a *Significant*, or (as your Writers almost always affect to speak, because, I suppose, it is a harder Word, and has a Termination which is ready to fright the common People) a *Symbolical* one, whereby, (it seems) it becomes a Sacrament of our own Institution: And by taking *thus* upon us to institute Sacraments, we invade, as you pretend, the Prerogative of *Christ*, whose alone it is to ordain Sacraments in his Church. This, Sir, is the Charge; and being so heavy, it ought, surely, to be supported with the clearest Evidence; whereas, in my Opinion, it may be, with the clearest Evidence, refuted.

Here, let it be observed, as a Preliminary, that the Question is *not* about an inconvenient and cumbersome *Multitude* of Ceremonies, such as all the Offices of the Church of *Rome* are perfectly covered with (for that, on all hands, is agreed to be justly offensive) but only about the Power of the Church to decree a Ceremony, or, if you please, two or three, supposing them always to be such as will become the Dignity and Majesty of God's Worship. And to shew you, it *has* such a Right, I will only ask this Question. The *holy Kiss*, as St. Paul calls it, or *the Kiss of Charity*, as it is called by St. Peter, used in the Primitive Apostolic Church, in the Celebration of the Lord's Supper, was *that* a Rite of *Divine Appointment*, or was it not? If you say, of *Divine Appointment*, I desire to know, by what Authority *you* and *we* both have laid it aside. If we have Authority to lay aside a Ceremony of *Di-*
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vine Appointment and *Ordination*, we have, certainly, Authority (for that, surely, is the less) to *ordain* one of our *own*. But if you shall say (which probably, is the Truth of the Case) *not* of Divine Appointment, but only ordained by the Apostles, without any Precept from the Lord, or any particular Direction from the Holy Spirit, a merely Ecclesiastical, prudential Institution, is not this saying, it was ordained by the Church? And since the Church, as a Church, or not considered under the immediate and extraordinary Guidance of the Holy Spirit, has the same Power and Authority in all Ages, the Apostolic no greater than the Present, I can't see, why it should be thought a more unwarrantable Thing, in the *present* Church, to injoin the Use of *the Sign of the Cross* in the Administration of *one* Sacrament, than it was, in the *Apostolic*, to ordain the *Kiss of Charity*, in the Celebration of the *other*.

The Rite or Ceremony just now mentioned, as ordained by the Apostles, and some other Rites which we find mention of in the sacred Writings, as used in the Assemblies of the first *Christians*, were all plainly, significant: And such were always the most approved of in the Primitive Church, as they are, now, in the reformed Churches. The *French* Church, in particular, approved of significant Ceremonies; and *Calvin* appears, in divers Parts of his Writings, to be entirely in the same Sentiments. He, indeed, is so far from making the Significancy of a Ceremony any just Prejudice against, or Objection to it, that he rather requires it, as a necessary Condition of its being Lawfully appointed. The Church of *Rome*, in the abundance of its Ceremonies, has some that are really significant, and some that are *not*. Which of these, think you, Sir, are the most exceptionable or defensible? Whether (for instance) the

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the Priest's *smiting his Breast*, when he says, in the Confession of his Sin, *mea culpa*, the Significancy of which is plain and solemn, or his *keeping his fore Fingers close to his Thumbs*, until he has washed them, and his *starting*, as if he was suddenly waked out of Sleep, when, after some secret Orations, he cries out aloud, *In omnia Sæcula Sæculorum*. Ceremonies these, without any Significancy at all, at least, any that is obvious, and which a Man, after guessing a thousand Times, and without the Help of their *Ritualists* or *Rationalists* (as, belike, they are called) would never be able to find out, and really are good for nothing, but to dazzle the Eyes, and perplex the Minds of the Worshippers. In my Way of thinking, an *insignificant* Ceremony differs little or nothing from an *impertinent* one; but when it has a real Significancy and Meaning, and that Meaning is not only *Natural* and *Obvious*, but also *Important* enough to find a Place in the Office wherein it is used, and *pertinently* inculcated therein, it then becomes *Instructive*, serving to put us in Mind of studying to attain some Grace, or to practice some Christian Duty. True, say you; this is the very Thing that we dislike the Sign of the Cross for, as it makes it a human Sacrament. But I beg your Pardon, Sir, for that, unless you can shew, that we use it, not only as a *Remembrance* or *Hint*, or a *Declarative Sign*, to others, of that Grace of Christian Fortitude, in openly Professing the Faith of *Christ* crucified, which all *Christians* are obliged to, but as a *Means* also whereby that Grace is conveyed, by the Spirit of God, into the Soul, or as a *Pledge* and *Earnest* to assure us, that it shall be, the Sign being duly received, conveyed into it.

Nor are these Arguments of yours against the Sign of the Cross, and all other Ceremonies, more easily

easily *refuted* than *retorted*. You are not, methinks, very consistent with yourselves, in condemning *so much* and raising *such* Opposition to *this* Ceremony, while nothing is said against some *others*. I have sometimes wondered, how the Ceremony of casting Earth upon the Body in the Burial of the Dead has escaped your Censure. There is no such Thing as a Ceremony in our Church, or in any Church whatever, if *that* is not one, and a Symbolical one too: Yet I don't remember ever to have met with any Objection to it, in any one of your Writers. And as to your People, they are, generally, (I'm persuaded) so far from being *displeased*, that they are rather *pleased* with it. And this, I think, I have plainly observed of many of them, when at the Burial of their Dead, where the throwing of *Earth to Earth, Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust*, has appeared to me to move and affect them in a sensible Manner, and to have ministered to them a pleasing Occasion for Reflections upon our Mortality. Then, there are the Ceremonies in Marriage. I shall not need to name, or count them up to you. 'Tis very well known, what they are, and that there are more in this Office than in any other: Yet, neither do your Writers, now a-days, complain of them, nor any of your People, as far as I hear, stumble at them; and whether they do, in their Judgments, approve of them, or whether they do *not*, yet, being determined to go through with them, they seem to think it advisable (as it is, to be sure, the wisest Part) not to say a Syllable against them. Perhaps, you will say, you submit to them as *Civil* Ceremonies; and indeed, I am inclined to think, that you do now, comply, generally, with them, as such. And this Reason of your so ready compliance with them * Mr. Peirce

* *Vindic. of Dissenters*, Part III. c. 9.

gives

gives us. *The Rites and Ceremonies of Marriage* (says he) *we judge, are purely Civil; and so, 'tis the Magistrate's Part to appoint them. — Let the Magistrate prescribe whatever civil and decent Rites he will, to testify and declare the Marriage, Subjects are bound to comply with them.* The Magistrate prescribe! For God's Sake, Sir, how does the Magistrate, *here, prescribe* the Rites and Ceremonies of Marriage, more than the other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church? He no otherwise prescribes them, than as the *Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England* are authorized by Act of Parliament; in which way, *all the Ceremonies of the Church of England are prescribed* by him. And if that will make those of the one Sort to be *civil* Rites, and to be, therefore, complied with, why should it not make the other to be such? I wish the Hearts of these Gentlemen would serve them to be as willing to comply with the other Rites, Ceremonies, and Constitutions of the Church, upon just and true Principles, as they are willing and ingenious to frame to themselves erroneous ones, to reconcile their Minds to *these*, which they find it convenient to submit to. The older Non-conformists had other, and, in my Opinion, truer Conceptions of these Matters, considering them as Rites and Ceremonies *Ecclesiastical*, and constantly opposing them, as such. And had we gone about to bear them in hand, they are only *Civil*, and prescribed by the Magistrate, which for that Reason no one need scruple; I dare say, we should have been long enough before we could have brought *them* into those Sentiments. “What!
 “*civil Ceremonies* (they would doubtless have said)
 “in the Church of God, in the Midst of the Ad-
 “ministration of a Divine Institution and Holy
 “Ordinance,

“ Ordinance, intermixt with Pastoral Exhortations,
 “ Holy Prayers, and solemn Benedictions, strongly
 “ significant and expressive of some Religious Truths
 “ or Duties, which the contracting Parties are
 “ then recognizing, or binding themselves to, and
 “ appointed, because so expressive of those Truths
 “ or Duties.” I’ll venture to say, these Things
 would have appeared to *them*, as I own they do to
 me, somewhat incomprehensible.

If you are thus inconsistent with yourselves in
 condemning *some* of our Ceremonies, while you
 have nothing to say against, and quietly submit to
others, you are still more inconsistent, in condemn-
 ing them, when, at the same Time, you have divers
 Ceremonies of your own. For such you really have,
 tho’ you seem not to know it. I will point them
 out, therefore, to your Observation. — Few of
 you, I suppose, at this Time of Day, have any
 Scruples about uncovering your Heads, whenever
 you enter either our Churches, or your own Meet-
 ings. But is not this a Ceremony? I am sure ^b *Cal-*
vin considered it as such. And, indeed, *bowing* the
 Head at the Name of *Jesus* is not more a Ceremo-
 ny, than *uncovering* it, at entering the Place of Di-
 vine Worship, nor, to my Apprehension, more
 exceptionable. And have you no Ceremonies in
 Ordination? Such of your Ministers as do receive Or-
 dination by Imposition of Hands, do, I presume, re-
 ceive it *kneeling*, (at least, I have heard of some that
 have) to signify and express that Humility, Subjection,
 and Lowliness of Heart, with which they receive the
 Gift of the Presbyterate, then about to be confer’d
 upon them, the Ordainer, as in the *French* Church,
 laying his Hands on, *standing*. And if this be done,
 as in that Church it is *professed* to be done, to signify,
 that he acts herein in the Name and by the Authority

^b Instit. Lib. 4. c. 10. Sect. 29.

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of God, here are two Ceremonies, and both as significant (since that is the great Fault) as the Sign of the Cross, or any other in our Church.—Again; in the Covenant between you and your Pastors to walk together in Christian Ordinances, I also suspect there are some Ceremonies; but as the Way and Manner of striking this Covenant is pretty much of a Secret, at least to *us*, I can only put it to *you*, who may have, perhaps, enter'd into it yourself, or, at least, have heard the Ceremonies thereof related by others, whether there *are*, or are *not*. This I am certain of, there was once a *League and Covenant*, with very solemn Ceremonies, as *lifting up the Hands to Heaven*, which your Fathers came *heartily* into. And they were made so solemn, that they might be the more affecting, and a stronger Tie upon the Conscience. A plain Confession, by the way, that, in the Acts of Religion, proper Ceremonies are useful to *stir up the dull Mind of Man*, and make lasting Impressions upon it.

Whenever, in any Act of Divine Worship, one particular Gesture is constantly and religiously observed, and never allowed to be departed from, and, especially, whenever it is observed by Reason of some peculiar Significancy therein, that Gesture, whatever it be, can't be denied to be a Ceremony. By this Rule, you will be found to have one Ceremony at least, in the Administration of the Lord's Supper. I will not insist upon what was *taught at London, and, in part, practised at Amsterdam* by some Independents, at the Time of their first appearing, viz. *That it was requisite for Communicants to participate in the Lord's Supper with their Hats on, as a Rite significant of their Table-honour, and Fellowship with Christ, but that the Minister should be uncovered, in Sign of his Service to the*

See Baylie's *Dissuasive* from the Errors, &c. p. 122.

Communicants, as the Lord's much honoured Children sitting covered when they ate of their Father's Meat, but will confine myself to the Manner and Posture wherein you, now, receive. We all know, this is sitting. This you observe constantly, regularly, and universally, as we do kneeling, and you do so, for the Sake of a great Significancy that is in it. According to Calderwood, this Significancy is, our Rest, and the entire Accomplishment of all the legal Ceremonies in our Lord Christ; tho' with what Propriety that Truth should be signified and inculcated in this Sacrament, rather than in that of Baptism, or indeed, in any other Office of the Church, I know not. According to ^d Mr. Cotton, and his New-English Independants, our Lord made a Symbolical Use of it, to teach the Church their Majority over their Ministers in some Cases, and their judicial Authority as Co-sessors with him, at the last Judgment: But these, I imagine, will hardly be allowed to be by your present Ministers, the true Reasons and Significancies of this Ceremony; but their Notion seems to be, that it is in token of our Fellowship with Christ, and the great Privilege and Honour we have of Communion with him^e. It is (says Mr. Boyse) most fit to signify our partaking of the precious Virtue and Fruits of the Sacrifice of Christ, and the Honour the blessed God puts upon us, when he admits us to sit down, as Guests, at his holy Table, in Token of our being received into a State of Amity and Peace with him. And by this Significancy (quoth he) that Posture seems recommended to us, as most agreeable to the Nature of the Institution. By this we may see, that, if our Church has the Sign of the Cross, your Churches have also their Ceremonies, and those too, no less significant than this;

^d Way of the Churches in New-England, p. 68.

^e Remarks on the Bishop of Derry's Discourse, p. 117.

and that, when it serves their Turn, the Significancy of a Ceremony, shall be made its great Commendation, and that, far from a ground of its Unlawfulness, or a Reason for laying it aside, it shall be esteemed a very good Reason for observing it.

But, in the Sacrament of Baptism itself, you have a Ceremony, and a Symbolical one too, I mean, giving the Christian Name to the baptized Party.—Now, I see you smile, as if you thought to I was going about to be *nugatory* or *merry*. But I desire you to forbear two or three Moments, and then if you see Cause, smile on. For my Part, I would not be thought other than very serious in this Argument, which I take to be solid, and to come up to the Point I use it for^f. Your Children, Sir, as well as ours, it is well known, have their Names given them in Baptism: These are called the Christian Names, to put them in perpetual Remembrance of their holy Profession. And Names are chosen, often by *us*, and by *you* oftener, such as signify some Privilege, or Blessing, some excellent Grace, or Duty of the Gospel. You will easily recollect the Names I mean, *Faith*, *Constancy*, *Patience*, *Charity*, *Praise God*, *Accepted*, and many more of the like Sort. Tell me, then, Sir, is not the giving the Christian Name, and such, especially, as the forementioned, an *Addition* to the Sacrament? Is it not, too, an *Imposition*? Is it not a *Ceremony*? Would not you call the giving a Name to Bells in their Consecration, according to the Order of the Church of *Rome*, a *vile Popish Ceremony*? And is not this, then, to be called, tho' not a *vile*, yet a *real* Ceremony as well? And is not this Ceremony *Significant*, or, if you please, *Symbolical*? And is it not a Sacrament, an *outward*

^f See the Case of the Cross in Baptism among the *London* Cases, p. 31.

Sign of an inward and spiritual Grace? As much a Sacrament, Sir, as much an *outward Sign of an inward and spiritual Grace*, as the *Cross* can be pretended to be. If there be any Difference, it should rather seem to be *more* so, because that is given, with *us*, and I suppose also, with *you*, in the very *Act* of Baptizing, while the other is made *after it is over*. And if a Man of a working and distinguishing Head, such as that of old Mr. *Baxter*, were not to think his Time ill employed, and could in his Conscience *dispense* with himself in writing and publishing a Book, to shew, that this is a *human Sacrament* added to that of *Christ's* Institution, and a *most Sacrilegious Usurpation of his Prerogative*, he might be able to amuse the World, puzzle the Cause, perplex and confound weak Heads, convince those who *wanted* to be convinced of it, and, in the whole, discourse upon this Argument with as much *Plausibility*, as any of your Writers have yet done, upon the other.

The Want of a godly Discipline in the Church is also objected, and held a sufficient Reason for separating from it. But if the Want of it was really as great as is pretended, Separation, on that Account, would not be justifiable. And for this I could quote you the holy Scriptures, the Sense and Practice of Antiquity, of foreign Protestant Divines, and their Churches, nay, of the ^s graver and soberer Sorts of Puritans and Non-conformists, all positively determining against the Lawfulness of dividing from any Church, for some Imperfections, or some A-

^s The Opinions of *Cartwright*, Dr. *Thomas Goodwin*, *Blake*, *Vines*, and others, even of Dr. *Owen*, and Mr. *Baxter*, that Discipline not being simply necessary to the being of a Church, it is not lawful to separate therefrom for the Want, or for some Irregularities in the Administration of it, may be seen collected in *The Case of Lay-Communion with the Church of England*, considered among the *London Cases*.

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buses and Irregularities in its Discipline, or even a total Want of it. But this Way of answering the Objection I shall at present wave, and take another, which seems better to fall in with the Measures I have been pursuing from the Beginning; and that is, representing the real State of our Discipline, from whence it may, probably, appear, there is not in our Church, *so great* a Want of it, as you seem, at present, to imagine, and then shewing that what Want of it there is (and I shall not deny but *that* is too great) it is owing to *you*, in a good Measure, and that *you* really want it as much, *yourselves*. As these Heads contain in them many Particulars, some Enlargement upon them will be necessary. And indeed, I am the more willing to go somewhat deeper into them, because from a Word or two I remember you dropt about Discipline, *the Want and the Disorders of it*, I suspect that Matter sticks not a little with you.

I agree with you, Sir, that the Discipline of the Church is of great Moment towards the Edification of its Members, and that the Fault is unpardonable, when Church-Governors let it fall, through a supine Carelessness and Neglect. It is a spiritual Sword put into their Hands, and it will be expected that they bear it not in vain, nor let it rust, and lie by useless, when Heresy or Immorality call for it. The Neglect of Discipline upon Hereticks was the great Crime of some of the Angels of the seven Churches of *Asia*, for which they stand reprov'd by the holy Spirit — *Thou sufferest that Woman Jezebel which calleth herself a Prophetess, to teach and to seduce my Servants.* — *Thou hast there them that hold the Doctrine of Balaam* — *So hast thou also them that hold the Doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which Thing I hate.* — *Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with*

with the Sword of my Mouth. These Reprehensions and Threatnings are severe: Yet it may be hoped, they will not light upon all to whom the Government of Churches is committed, even where there is a great Prostration of its Discipline. For that may be owing to Causes which it is not in *their* Power to remove. The higher Powers may cramp them in the Exercise of it: And where they are more at Liberty, the Circumstances of the Times may be such as will make it, upon the whole of the Matter, more prudent, and more for the Interest of *Christianity*, to slacken the Reins a little. When the Distempers of the Times are evidently too strong for the Discipline of the Church to contend with, it may be a wise Part in the Governors thereof (at least if the Cause of Religion and Virtue is not immediately concerned) not to *enrage* them more by a too *warm*, or discover their own Weakness by an *insignificant* and *unavailing* Opposition. 'Tis a Censure which *Cicero* passes upon one of the *Cato's*, that by his unseasonable and undistinguishing Rigours, he sometimes hurt the Common-wealth. *Nocet interdum Reipublicæ, dicit enim tanquam in Platonis Πολιτείᾳ, non tanquam in sæce Romuli sententiam.* And when the Decay of the antient Discipline was complained of to the Roman Senate, and a Motion made to revive it, *Tiberius* writ to them against it, telling them, *it was dangerous to strive against such general and prevailing Evils, and to go about imposing, with a high Hand, those Severities and Restraints which the People had been so long unaccustomed to.* And if this related to Matters not absolutely necessary, it was a right Observation. An Age of great and general Corruption seems, indeed, to call more loudly for the Restraints of Church Discipline; but then it will not bear them: Especially, if there appears,
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at the same time, in almost all Orders and Ranks of Men, an unaccountable Dislike of all Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction, if both the Tongues and the Pens of Men are let loose against it, and it be grown *Modish* to rail at it. Those who sit at the Helm, when such a Storm rises, and beats hard upon them, will find it, probably, their Prudence, not to bear up against it too much, but give way to its Impetuosity, and ride it out as well as they can, in hopes it will abate, before long, and some unforeseen Cause will make it subside and settle, and *still the Madness of the People*. And yet, in the worst State of things, something may be done towards the Recovery of a more perfect Discipline. *Deus omnia paulatim*. Sudden and violent Changes or Reformati-
 ons in all *Political Bodies, Civil or Ecclesiastical*, as well as *Human* ones, may be dangerous; but Things may be brought about, by insensibly Degrees, to the State one desires, and Discipline restored, in a good Measure, by little and little, unheeded in a manner, and without causing any great Shakings of the Constitution. And may I presume to say, that Church-Governors will be obliged to lay hold of every favourable Juncture, and watch all Opportunities to do their Duties, and not make *the Badness of the Times* a Pretence for their Neglect, when, perhaps, *Indolence, Pusillanimity, or Worldly-Wisdom* are at the Bottom of it.

I will not now, Sir, dissemble the Matter: I have been setting forth the Case of the Church of *England*, and making such Apology as I could for it. There is a Want of Discipline in it, and that is owing in a good Measure to the Causes before-mentioned. Whoever looks into our *Rubricks, Canons, and Constitutions* will find, *there*, a most excellent Scheme of *Ecclesiastical Discipline*. Yet, let it be owned, that, as it appears in Use and Practice,

tice, it does by no means correspond with that Idea the Laws of the Church give us of it ; tho' it be, yet, far from fallen into that *deplorable Dissolution*, and *total Disuse*, which your Writers, Sir, would fain make the World believe it is. If *they* are to be believed, every Thing is amiss, every Thing out of Order among us. ^h Mr. *Peirce* observes, we ourselves lament, once a Year, every *Ash-Wednesday*, the Want of Discipline, and express our Wishes for the Revival of it : Tho' he fears these Wishes are but faint ; and *tho' the pious Part of the Clergy earnestly desire it, and, perhaps, carefully endeavour it, yet the greater Part desire it not, but rather hinder all such Designs*. He insinuates his Fears, *that the troublesome divided Circumstances we are now in, are the Punishment of our Sin, in neglecting and destroying Church Discipline, and that God is hereby calling us to restore it ;* but, however, intimates his Hopes, too, *that our merciful Father will please, by his holy Spirit, to stir us up to amend it, They long, he says, to see that Day, and prays heartily to God that he would hasten it*. It looks mighty good, and extremely obliging, to use Expressions of such Commiseration towards us, and to pray so devoutly on our Behalf. Only, I have some Fear, all his *Charity* will be *mistaken*, and his Prayers for the Church no otherwise considered, than those of Mr. *Whitfield* for his Opposers are used to be, to wit, as *rhetorical Aggravations*, and *artful Heightnings* of the Reproach, to make the wretched Condition of our Discipline appear in the stronger Light. We will, then, see what is the true State of our Discipline, and whether, Sir, your Friends, in Consideration of the Strictness of their own, have any Right to reproach *us* for the Want of it.

Will you be pleased, Sir, to look again into,

^h *Vindicat. of Dissenters*, Part III: ch. 16.

and carefully consider, the *Commination*. You will find nothing *there* either *expressing* or *implying* a Want of *all* Discipline. What we there say is *much to be wished* is only this, *the Restoration of that godly Discipline there was in the Primitive Church, that, at the Beginning of Lent, such Persons as stood convicted of notorious Sin were put to open Penance*. That is to say, we wish it was a practicable Thing, to bring, at the Beginning of *Lent*, all scandalous and notorious Sinners before the Church, and then cast them, continuing impenitent, out of it. The Revival of this Piece of Discipline (which is but one out of a great many) is the whole Matter of our Wish *there*. And as the Church in this Office, so some of the Bishops, in their Sermons, at the very Beginning of the Reformation, complained of the same Thing. Good old *Latimer* complained of it from the Pulpit, before King *Edward VI.* and earnestly moved his Grace, *that there might be restored to the Church the Discipline of Christ against notable Offenders*. But nothing was done in the Matter. This probably, was owing, partly to the Difficulty of introducing the ancient Discipline, and partly to the little Thought that was taken about it: To bring Men back from the *Popish* to the *Primitive* Discipline, at the Beginning of *Lent*, that is, from only whispering their Sins (in Company with the best of their Neighbours, which quite takes off the Shame of the Matter) in the Ear of a Priest, and receiving from him an Absolution, with some kind of Penance, one, perhaps, of their own chusing, which might be performed by themselves, or by another; to bring them, (I say) from *this* to *open and publick Admonitions*, to a *Confession of their Sins* before the whole Church, with Declarations of their *unfeigned Repentance*, may be conceived no easy Thing to be done, tho' it had been zealously attempted.

tempted. But indeed it was not; not so, as it *might* and *ought* to have been, tho', indeed, more *here*, than in most *other* Churches of the Reformation. The Thoughts and Pens of all learned Protestants, for many Years, were wholly employed about Doctrinal Matters, exposing the Errors and Corruptions, and taking the People off from the idolatrous, and superstitious Practices of Popery; and there was little Care, especially abroad, about Discipline and Order. *Luther, Calvin, Zuinglius*, and other Heads of the Reformation, writ and preach'd a great deal against the Church of *Rome*, but did little else. *They did*, as Dr. *Maurice* very justly observes, *the Work of Evangelists, rather than of Governors of Churches*: and Ecclesiastical Polity was so long neglected, that infinite Disorders grew up in them, and threatened them with Ruin. And when they began to set up such a Discipline as they could, in many Places, it was difficultly admitted, and, in some, not admitted at all, but all Coercion was left to the Civil Magistrate. Matters were not in so bad a State here in *England*: For here, the Episcopal Authority, by the good Providence of God, being preserved, a Form of Discipline was also preserved, and kept up, from the Beginning, tho' not always, 'tis true, administered in so perfect a Manner, as might be wished. And our Ecclesiastical Factions and Discontents, *first then*, the Rebellion and Usurpation ensuing, *afterwards*, a general Looseness and Dissoluteness of Manners, and, *last of all*, a Looseness of Principles, as was too natural, ensuing, made it impossible to be carried to any Degrees of Primitive Perfection. It may be thought there have been some favourable Opportunities to mend it, if they had happily been seized, and all concerned had been hearty. If there have, they are *slipt*, and cannot be *now* recalled,

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called. At least, the Temper and Habit of the present Times is too evidently such, that it would be extreme Folly to think of doing a great deal, and the Height of Rashness to undertake to revive, especially all at once, all the Rigours of antient Discipline, as you, it should seem, would have us do. Would you have Church-Governors always act like natural inanimate Bodies, never to suspend their Powers, but be continually exerting the utmost Possibility of their Force? Would you have them deal out their Censures at all Hazards, *drive on*, without minding Consequences, tho' the World should be turned up-side down, or *set in a Flame* by it? Certainly, Prudence, which is an Ability to judge, from the Consideration of Times, Places, Things, and Persons, what, upon all Occasions, is best and fittest to be done, and how done in the best Manner, ought to prevail *in all Things*, and in nothing more than in Matters of Discipline and Government. And as you are endowed with an eminent Share of it, you will be, I dare say, of Opinion (I mean, if you will but reflect, and not suffer yourself to be carried away with popular Noise and Prejudice) that an exact Discipline is impossible to be set up, and would do more Harm than Good, if it were, *now*, to set up amongst us.

The *Church of Scotland* (as ⁱ Mr. *Pierce*, at least, tells us) *is famed for curbing and restraining Impiety, which elsewhere rages without Controul*, and has been sometimes proposed, as a Pattern of exact Discipline for *us* to follow. I shall not, at present, inquire whether this Character be true. But supposing it to be so, there is so great a Difference in the external State of the two Churches, that *neither* should be proposed, as a proper Pattern for the *other*. They in *Scotland* are so much *loved*, or so much

ⁱ Dedication of his Vindication of the Dissenters.

feared,

feared, or, however it comes about, are so *happy*, as to have the *Assemblies of their Clergy always sitting*, who can immediately apply Remedies to any growing Evil or Abuse, and keep it from being fixt. They have not been, yet, inebriated with those Notions of *Christian Liberty*, *Liberty boundless and uncontrouled*, which have been disseminated among *us*, in Pamphlets, and Weekly Papers, and (poor Men!) are yet ignorant of their Right to do in Religion whatever they list, notwithstanding the great Pains their Brethren *here* have taken to shew it them. The general Poverty of the People keeps them more humble, and their Want of the Materials for Luxury (the Source of all our Corruptions here in *England*) with their living at such a Distance from the great Seat of it, keeps them, I guess, more virtuous and innocent. Then, the Power of their Clergy, which is there suffered, I know not how, to be skrewed up into a kind of Independency, makes them more revered by the People, and gives them a greater Influence and Authority over them. *All together* dispose them cheerfully to receive the Yoke of Discipline, to submit to Rules and Orders, to any Restraints, or even Censures that are thought fit to be laid upon them: While, with *us*, the most *gentle* Restraint, tho' it be, too, ever so *necessary*, shall be exclaimed against, as an insupportable Piece of Ecclesiastic Pride and Tyranny; every Animadversion upon the Crimes of Men of any tolerable Condition and Way of living in the World, an insolent Triumph over their Quality, which they resolve to revenge, some way or other, upon the Church. Considering these Distempers and ill Humours of the Times, and how much also Vice and Wickedness abound, insomuch that, if all were treated as, by the Rules of the antient Discipline, they were to be, we must interdict from Christian Privileges almost

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most half the Kingdom, considering, I say, these Things, a little *Temper and Moderation*, or (if you will call it so) a little *Slackness* in the Government of the Church, should not, surely, be esteemed so great, and so unpardonable a Fault.

It was thought by most the great Mistake of that Man of *downright unpolished Integrity*, Archbishop *Laud*, that, in his Endeavours to restore Discipline, he did not enough consider the Tempers and Conditions of the People he had to deal with, and what the Times would bear; but, as the noble Historian informs us, *If the Faults and Vices were fit to be look'd into, let the Persons be who they would that were guilty of them, they were sure to find no Connivance, but to be prosecuted to their Shame and Punishment.* You know, Sir, the Sectaries *then* did not like *this*; nay, they pursued him to Death, in a good Measure, on the Account of it. And do you imagine your Party would really like it, *now*? Or that, in Case the Church were to pursue the same Measures, they would applaud her for it, and support her in it? Indeed, you are mistaken, if you think so. There is rather Reason to believe these heavy Complaints of our Want of Discipline are made, to goad and stimulate my Lords the Bishops to do as that illustrious Archbishop did, with no good Intention towards us. They plainly see the Indisposition of the Times for it, and that any high Acts of Church Power would certainly sharpen Men's Humours, *raise* in some, and *increase* in others, a Disinclination to the Church; and then, who can tell but what *has* been *may* be, and what *may*, at last, turn up, to their Advantage? But to say the Truth, I rather believe they do it, not so much out of Policy, and with a deep Design of drawing us into this Snare, as out of stark Love of finding Fault with the Church, and to increase the Number

ber of *plain Reasons* for their Dissent from it.

They are not, methinks, very wise, I mean wise for themselves, and their own Safety, when they call *so* upon us to revive and restore the antient Discipline. For, by the Rules of *that*, open Schismatics were treated almost as roughly as any Sort of Offenders whatsoever; and this I leave to their serious Consideration. 'Tis more to my present Purpose to observe, that it is not fair (as once *Calvin* complained was *his Case*) *Dissipationem, cujus ipsi causa sunt, probri loco nobis objectare*, to throw in our Teeth that Dissolution of Church Discipline which they themselves are the Causes of. If that be owing to *them* chiefly, it would, surely, be right to hold their Tongues, and say not a Word about it. Indeed Mr. *Peirce* says, *It is not long of us that they cannot govern their own Members*. Yes, but it is *long of them*, in a great Measure. For have not they joined their Endeavours with Latitudinarians and Free-Thinkers to cry down the Power of the Church? Have not they openly taught, it has no Power but what is merely persuasive, which, properly speaking, is none at all. And does not this Position tear up from beneath our Feet the very Ground and Foundation of all Government and Discipline? *No Authority, no Discipline*, one would think might pass for a plain and incontestable Aphorism; and if the common People are taught the Former, they are not such stark Fools, and so void of all natural Logic, but they can, themselves, infer the Latter. The Consequence is so plain, so easy, so just, and natural, that they may be trusted with drawing it for themselves. I can hardly think with what Face any Person who occupies the Place of a Church Governor, after having maintained, in the Face of the World, that the Church has *no Authority at all*, can go about to do any *Act*

of

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of Discipline; or if he has the Assurance (for I really
do think it requires some Assurance) to do *that*, how
he can expect due Submission from those that are
subject to him, or how complain, if he finds them
unruly, and disobedient, and not disposed to regard
him, in any Thing. For such Behaviour is but the
practical Part of his own Doctrine. And it is too
evident, the present Contempt of all spiritual Au-
thority in *most of all* Ranks of Men is, in a good
Measure, the baneful Fruit of such Doctrines as
these, in propagating which every Body knows
your Ministers, Sir, have had no inconsiderable
Share.

But they have ruined Discipline another Way, by
the Divisions they have made among us. In such a
distracted State of Things as they have thrown us
into, an exact Discipline can't be expected to be
preserved. For who will value the Censures of the
Church, or who will Care for being thrown out of
it, while they may be received in other Christian
Societies, with open Arms? It is the commonest
Thing in the World to hear People openly threaten,
they will go to the Meeting, if they are not indulged
in all their unreasonable Demands, and disorderly
Ways, by which Means they often get to be indul-
ged in them. Mr. Peirce says, *We are afraid to*
reject Hereticks, and other notorious Sinners, from
our Communion, lest they go over to them. No, we
are not afraid to reject *such* from our Communion,
for *that* or for *any* Reason; but, perhaps, we may
think it both a *prudent* and *charitable* Part rather to
overlook some Things that are not very gross, which
yet might deserve some Animadversion, than that
the People should leave the Church, and become
Schismatics, and so involve themselves in a Sin of a
much deeper Dye than their other Offences were. To
allay our Fears of losing Hereticks, and other scan-
dalous

dalous Sinners, from our Communion, he assures us, *those Fears are causeless, for they should admit no such to their Communion, unless they mend their Manners.* What does the Gentleman say? No Hereticks, no *Arians*, for instance, in your Communion! No scandalous Sinners, no *Fornicators, Adulterers, Drunkards, Revilers or Extortioners*, received into *your Churches*! I must beg your Pardon, if I am not satisfied of *this*, and *demur* upon it. For I could never perceive the Doors of the Meeting were ever shut against any, but that all Comers were welcome. And if such profligate Persons be not admitted to *sit at the Lord's Table* (which, in all likelihood, they will not desire to do) they need not fear being admitted to all the other Parts of your Worship.

But what if, Sir, after all, it appears, there is as great a Want of Discipline in *your Churches*, as in the Church of *England*? it may be reasonably supposed, the Doctrine beforementioned must have upon the Members of *your Churches*, as well as of *ours*, some Influence to make them less tractable and obsequious to your Discipline, than they might otherwise have been. And why, too, may it not be supposed, *you* are as much afraid to censure *your People*, as *we ours*, for fear they come over to the Church? I am sure, *you* have, I should have said *your Ministers* have, generally, one Reason to be *more* afraid of censuring, or *any way* disoblighing them, as they depend *more* upon their Number, and Benevolence. This reasoning, I own, is of no Weight, if the Fact be found otherwise, as indeed, Mr. *Peirce*, in the Book before quoted, says it is. And to shew it is, he has given us as hideous a Representation of our Discipline as he well could. But ought he not then to have given us *some* Representation of *your own*, that it might have been seen, upon a Comparison, *which* was preferable? But

not a tittle of that, I assure you. Indeed, he does say, (and saying is all, which is very easy) you have *a deal of Discipline*. For he asks, *Why don't they use as much Discipline, as they see we do? Why don't they as well as we, keep Hereticks, and profligate Sinners from their Communion?* As they see we do! For my Part, I see it no more than your People, Sir, I believe, *feel* it. He must be *seconded-sighted* who can see any such Thing. Where is it, Sir, to be *seen*? Not, I am sure, in Use and Practice. Have you, then, any Book of Discipline? Where is that to be *seen*? No, indeed, you seem to do all without Book, as if you thought any Scheme or pre-composed Form of Church Discipline as bad a Thing as a Form of Prayer. An exact Account of your Discipline, we should be mighty glad to *see*. We have long wish'd for it, but I fear we are yet like to go without it. It will hardly be thought adviseable to expose all your Church-Dealings to publick Canvassing and Examination. Yet, as he has mention'd your keeping *Hereticks* and *profligate Sinners* from your Communion, and piqued himself so much upon those Accounts, a few Thoughts shall be bestowed on each.

It must be owned, you have a short and easy Way to come at heretical Ministers, and eject them. Let but the People withdraw his Pay, and the Thing is done at once. I mean, Sir, if the People continue, themselves, in orthodox Sentiments, for otherwise, it can't be expected they should dismiss him, and the Heretick is fixt immoveably in his Post. Or if you think it more *Decent* and *Ecclesiastical* to have it done by the Interposition of neighbouring Ministers, it may be done, without much Difficulty, *that* Way. For the Heretick, when he appears before them, cannot intrench himself behind *Forms of Law*, nor take Advantage of the
dilatatory

dilatory Proceedings of all legal Courts : But, as your Churches have not bounded themselves by any Rules which may not be departed from, they may proceed against him in a summary and arbitrary Way; and there is none to whom he may appeal against their Sentence and Determination. This, we'll say, is an Advantage you have for getting rid of Hereticks, in a quick and easy Way. But what doth it signify, if no body can tell who are Hereticks? You know who it was, (one of your selves) who openly asserted such a Notion of Heresy, as makes it impossible for any, besides God and themselves, to know, who *are* Hereticks; and who can doubt, but it was with Intent to skreen and protect them from all Censure? This, at least, must unavoidably be the Consequence and Effect. For if his Notion of Heresy be *right*, there is no doubt, but it would be *wrong* to call any Man Heretick, and much more to prosecute and censure him, as such, unless God, the Searcher of Hearts, should reveal, or himself confess, that he maintains his Opinions against his Judgment, and under the Condemnation of his own Mind. And if he confesses *that*, it will not be much Harm *he* can do; and it would be pity he should be pursued, or any way molested, as a *Heretick*, but begging him for a *Fool* would be the most reasonable Treatment of him.

Before this Notion of Heresy was so publickly defended, you *did*, indeed, fall pretty foul upon a few whom you esteemed Hereticks: You turned them out of their Pastoral Employments; and so far, I readily own, you acted laudably. But I have not heard you went any farther, or that you *turn'd them out of your Communion*, as Mr. Peirce would have us believe you *always* do. And if you did suffer them to *continue still* in your *Communion*, you have not so much, as Mr. Peirce pretends, in point of Discipline, to boast of. Mr. Pierce himself,

it seems, was one of the Gentlemen who received this Discipline, on Account of *his* Heresy about the Trinity ; and 'tis worth while to know how he behaved under it. Why truly, Sir, not at all like the Man who had been calling, before, so loudly upon the Church of *England* to reject all Hereticks, who laid such a Load of Reproach upon it for its Slackness and Remissness, and set such a high Value upon *your* Churches for their Care and Diligence in that Matter, but rather like one who held it unwarrantable to molest any, on such Accounts : For all the Proceedings against him he was pleased to call *Violence, Tyranny, Persecution, an Inquisition as true as ever there were any in Spain or Portugal*, as may be seen in the Pamphlets by him publish'd, on that Occasion. This, Sir, is *he* who had writ, a very little while before, *Why don't they use as much Discipline, and keep Hereticks from their Communion, as they see we do!*

The Disputes among the *London* Ministers, at the same Time, about Subscribing or not Subscribing, the first Article of the Church of *England*, and the 5th and 6th Answers of the Assembly's Catechism, concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity, will not be soon forgotten. Those who were for Subscribing considered, generally, the other, as *Arians* ; and it is, from their Writings, too plain, that many of them really were. And these, on the other hand, considered *them*, as *Athanasians*, that is to say, as great Hereticks, in their Opinions, as they, *themselves*, were reputed to be by *their* Adversaries. Yet I don't remember there was much *ejecting*, or *rejecting* among you, on that Occasion : But by the Help of *Comprehensive Principles*, and of some pacific Treatises, such as *The conciliatory Letter, The Apology for both Parties, The Doctrine of the Trinity no Fundamental, &c.* to-

gether with a little Reflection upon the Danger of ruining the Dissenting Interest by your Divisions, Matters were brought, at length, to an amicable Accommodation, each Party receiving, as Brethren, and running into the Embraces of the other. Such Hereticators are *you*, Sir! Such is the Rigour of *your* Discipline! and so it is you *turn Hereticks out of your Communion!*

As to notorious evil Livers, it no way appears to me, they have any Reason to be afraid of greater Molestation from *your* Discipline, than from *ours*. *Excommunications*, I suppose, are not very frequent among you: *Authoritative Admonitions* before the Church, for great Scandals and Offences, are as little heard of; and a *publick Penance*, in one of *your* Congregations, would be, I presume, a new Thing to behold. Our Country, Sir, you know, abounds with Dissenters of all Sorts; and tho' I have lived in it the greatest Part of my Life, yet, to the best of my Remembrance, no one Act of Church Discipline, in either of those Kinds, has ever been reported to me, or come, any way, to my Knowledge, tho' I have known many who deserved it, and some who did as richly deserve the severest Exercise thereof, as the incestuous *Corinthian*. Which I mention, because I know you are all apt to say, there is not much need of Discipline on Account of *disorderly and offensive Walking*, in *your* Churches. Formerly, perhaps, it might be so; but *now*, *Toleration*, *Ease*, *Security*, and a *general overflowing of Luxury* in the Nation, have brought Things between *you* and *us*, as to the Strictness of our living, pretty near a Level, as I have shewn more at large in my first Letter, which I refer you to.

Here then I shall rest the Matter: There is, in our Church a Want of Discipline confessed; but
there

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there is an *equal* or *greater* Want of it, tho' not so ingenuously confessed, in *yours*. *We* have, at least, the *Shadow* of it, which, I doubt, can't be said for *you*. All the Forms of it, to be sure, (and that is something towards its Revival and Restoration) are kept up among *us*; and we trust in God, *these dry Bones will*, one Day, *live*, and that by his Holy Spirit's working, in his good Time, upon the Minds, especially, of those who have it most in their Power, and are more properly concerned, these Forms will be animated with such a vigorous Exercise of that Power which God has given to his Church, as will reasonably well answer the End of it.

Vain indeed, and visionary are these Hopes, if what you say be true; for you say, the whole Frame and Constitution of the Church must be taken down, and one of another Sort erected, before a regular Discipline can be introduced. But God forbid we should be reduced to such an unhappy Alternative, that either Foundations must be removed, or we must, for ever, be content with our present State of Discipline, and that general Relaxation of it which it now lies under. Let us then see whether the Case be really so bad; whether the present Constitution of our Church will not *admit* of good Discipline, and whether your Churches are *better calculated* for it.

You assert, there is no Possibility of an exact Discipline in Diocesan Churches; and the Reason of this extraordinary Assertion is no better than this, that 'tis impossible one Bishop should Personally inspect and take the Cognizance of all Things and Causes that arise within a large District; a Reason that holds as strong against all Governments, Civil as well as Ecclesiastical, that are of any Extent. And how much stronger is it against the *British* Monarchy,

Monarchy, which contains, in *England and Ireland*, almost fifty of those Dioceses, besides a large Country of Presbyterian Ground at home; and many large Provinces of the *American World*. Doubtless, you will say, the King governs the Realm by subordinate Magistrates, who are Sharers of his Power. And does not the Bishop rule his Diocese *so*? And why, Sir, *may not* that be? Mr. *Baxter*, I think, allows he *may* substitute another to toll the Bell to Church. So far, he is very good, and we thank him for it. But may he do nothing else *per alium*? Whatever is done besides, must he needs be, in *propria Persona*, the Doer of it? For what Reason, I pray? What is there in *Episcopacy* more than in *Royalty*, that none of the Powers of it *can* or *ought* to be delegated, but every Thing must be done by the Bishop only, or, however, under his *immediate* Inspection? at least, why must a *Bishop* have an *immediate* and *personal* Concern, in every Thing and Matter that is done, more than an *Apostle*? For it is evident, St. *Paul* had not. He tells the *Corinthians* (1 Cor. i. 17.) that *Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel*. The former, it seems, was not *so much*, and *so immediately*, his Work, as the latter: And therefore to *this* he almost wholly applied himself, leaving *that* to others, whom he had appointed over that Business. And he, accordingly, tells them (thanking God for it too, so far was he from thinking it any Neglect or Failure in his Duty) *he had baptized none of them but Crispus and Gaius*, tho' he had lived there (and we may be sure was not idle) a long Time, and (as appears from *Acts* xviii. 8, 10.) made many Converts in their City.

The Pretence of the Impossibility of good Discipline under Diocesan Episcopacy is perfectly groundless and unreasonable. For, surely, there
may

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may be good Discipline wherever there *may be* good Laws, and a due Execution of them. And why both *may not be* in Diocesan Churches, I am at a Loss to comprehend. It will hardly, I think, be denied by the stoutest of you all, but, that good and wholesome Laws *may be* made under Diocesan Governments; and those who, in Subordination to the Bishop, are to execute those Laws, or any of them, *may*, of themselves, do it, as conscientiously, as he himself would have done; and such as are negligent of their Duty he can compel to it.—If this, Sir, does not satisfy, (as I think it may) we have plain and undeniable *Fact* to appeal to. The Discipline of the *Primitive* Church you must allow was *good*; else, why is the *present* Church reproached for the Want of it, and call'd upon *so* to restore it: And yet this was exercised under Diocesan Episcopacy, and where the Dioceses, too, were sometimes as large as most of ours are, which learned Men, whom I could refer you to, have abundantly demonstrated. Here, then, we have an *Argument against Fact*, which every body knows, and *common Sense* will teach us, is worth nothing. For if it be certain, a Thing *has been*, all the Arguments and Speculations in the World will not be convincing that it *cannot be*.

But be, Sir, this Matter as it will, I don't see how it is mended by the *Presbyterian* Platform, wherein the Exercise of Discipline, in most Cases, is *wholly reserved*, in others, *ultimately resorts* to certain Assemblies of the Clergy. The Constitution of the Church of *Scotland* is, I suppose, truly Presbyterian; but, in that, I perceive, the *Kirk Session*, or *Parish Consistory*, which is composed of Ministers, Elders, and Deacons, judges only in Matters of lesser Scandal, and in these, too, there lies an Appeal from *them*. All Matters of greater Scandal,

Scandal, such as *Adultery, &c.* are left, in the first Instance, to the *Presbytery* of the Place, and from these also is an Appeal to the *Provincial Synods*, as, from these Synods, there is a *farther Appeal* to the *general Assemblies of the Clergy*. The general Assembly, therefore, has, you see, the Cognizance of all Causes whatsoever that arise within the Church of *Scotland*; and that, you know, is of equal Extent with a good Number of our *Dioceses* put together. 'Tis like, you will say, *that Assembly* is made up of *many*. My Answer is, they *all* stand upon the *same Ground*; and if forty Men are placed together upon an Eminence, they can't see farther than any one of them may, provided his Eye-sight be as good as that of the rest.

But why do I speak of *Presbyteries, Synods, and National Assemblies*, when we have, I suppose, no such Things in *England*? For tho' we have Churches which *are pleased to be called Presbyterian*, these are govern'd as absolutely (for what I can see) as the rest, by their own Officers, the Pastors and Elders of the Church, from whom there is no Appeal to any proper superior Jurisdiction, which is the very Essence of Independency. Let us then see, if the independent or congregational Plan be better calculated for good Discipline: And I doubt it will be found, that, if, in *Diocesan* Episcopacy, the District is *too large* for good Order and Discipline to be kept up in, in *Congregational*, it is *too small*; if, in the former, the Governors and Governed are *too far off*, in the latter, they are as much *too near*.

The Plan of Independency is, that every Congregation or worshipping Assembly has a compleat Jurisdiction, and is entirely govern'd within itself. Here, now, is a Crowd of petty independent Jurisdictions, fifty, and, perhaps, more, nay, an

hundred, or, as it may happen, several hundreds, within the same Walls. For (say your Independents) any six or seven covenanting together will make a Church compleatly organized; three or four composing the *Presbytery*, and the *Fraternity* consisting of three or four more. A very pretty Constitution! A Constitution, which must produce continual Dissentions, Dissentions too without Remedy, and, as such, was condemned by the *French Church* in the third *Synod of Charenton*^k, where it is declared *not only prejudicial to the Church of God, (because as much as in it lieth, it doth usher in Confusion, and openeth a Door to all Kinds of Singularities, Irregularities and Extravagancies, and barreth the Use of those Means which would most effectually prevent them) but also is very dangerous to the Civil State, as forming as many Religions as there are Parishes, and particular distinct Assemblies among them.* It is almost unavoidable but each of these Congregations will have some singular Opinions and Practices of its own, which falling immediately under the Eye and Observation of all the Neighbouring Congregations, will be extremely offensive to them, from whence Controversies and perverse Disputings will naturally arise. And how shall they be ended, there being no Authority that can silence, controul, or censure the Contumacious? Synods may meet, and talk over the Matter, and give their *humble Advice* upon it: But, by their common Principles, (for they are all, Sir, you know, *absolutely independent* of each other) none shall need to submit to them any farther than they think fit.

As to Offences that may arise within their particular Congregations, 'tis own'd the Independent Constitution lodges Authority enough in the Church and the Officers thereof, to take them away, or

^k *Quick's Synodicon.*

reform them, if they were but disposed to *use* it, and the People equally disposed to *submit* to it. Every Parish or Congregation has as much Power as *the Sovereign Pontiff himself*, in Spirituals; indeed a great deal more than is fit to be put into the Hands of such Persons, as 'tis commonly entrusted with. The Plenitude of Ecclesiastical Power is too great a Trust to be committed to every Teacher, Elder, and Deacon, or indeed to every Pastor or Minister of God's Word, and particularly (to say nothing of those, who in advanced Years are rash, or weak, or indiscreet) to every *young* Divine, who nevertheless, in hopes of future Proficiency in Knowledge, and Increase of Experience, may be trusted, as in our Church, with the Function of Preaching, and Administring Sacraments to a Congregation, under *the Guidance and Controul of another*. Here, the Parish Priest has as much Jurisdiction as is convenient and reasonable he should. He has a Power to admit all to Baptism who are entitled to it. He has also as much Power as any Presbyterian or Congregational Minister, to repel open and scandalous Sinners from the Lord's Table, only *signifying* (which, surely, is but reasonable) *to the Ordinary*, and that only, *if he require it, or any Complaint be made, the Cause thereof, and obeying therein his Direction*. No Excommunication of his Parishioners can take Effect, without his Concurrence. But to put the whole Power of Excommunication into *his* Hands, would be as unreasonable and of as ill Consequence, as to give the Mayor of any mean Corporation an absolute Right to deprive, at Pleasure, any Member thereof of the Benefit of the Laws, and put him out of the King's Protection.

Considering, then, how great an Authority the Pastors and other Officers of these Churches have, a Man would expect a very great Regulation of

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Affairs, that all Things amiss should be rectified, all Abuses removed, and that no Person deserving Animadversion should pass unreprieved, or uncensured. But, alas, there are many Things that hinder; as, *First, the great Dispersion of their Flocks.* These Gentlemen, Sir, your Ministers, are great Pluralists: Their People commonly live here, below in the Country, dispersed through ten or a dozen Parishes, and these, too, in *Ireland*, and some Parts of *England*, Parishes of great Extent. Above, they are scattered through every Part of the great Cities of *London, Westminster*, and the *Borough*; and it may be reasonably supposed, there is hardly a Parish, nay, scarcely a Street or Lane, but sends some of its Inhabitants to help make up your larger Congregations. And hence it is that your Pastors have little more Knowledge of a great Part of those who embrace their Ministry, and attend their Preaching, than any Methodist-Preacher has of those who, from all Parts of the Town, flock after him, and are hardly more capable than *he* of watching over their Conversation, in a *pastoral* Manner.

But, suppose their Flocks were collected, and had their ordinary Habitations, as in the establish'd Church, within parochial Bounds, and they had, under their Eye, and more immediate Observation, all manner of Persons and Offence they are concerned with, it may be fairly supposed, they will be pretty indulgent to such of their Flocks as may stand in need of Reproof, or deserve Censure, by Reason they so much depend upon their Benevolence, often, perhaps, for their whole Maintenance. Or, if they have *Fortitude* enough (which I will charitably suppose many have) to cast behind them all Considerations of that Sort, they will be often kept from exercising Discipline with an impartial Strictness, by their Foresight of those Heats, Ruptures,

tures, and Confusions, and that Estrangement of their People's Affections which it will naturally occasion. And if it be ask'd whether this Consideration will not equally impede the Exercise of Discipline in Diocesan Churches, I answer, *No*; because it is human Nature to bear the Severities of Discipline from their Spiritual Pastors *at some Distance*, with more Patience and Resignation, than from their *immediate Guides*, by whom they expect, tho' indeed often without Reason, to be always treated with the *greatest Indulgence*, and led with all the *Gentleness* in the World.

Then again, it is well known, there are always many of your Churches without *proper* Pastors, having no other than some young Men, who are *Candidates* for the Ministry, to pray and preach *before* them, till they have some Evidence of the Acceptableness of their Gifts. May these, Sir, take upon them to *rebuke*, and *to rebuke with Authority*? No certainly; they have no Authority at all. May they presume to censure, or excommunicate any? By no Means; these are Acts of *Pastoral Power* and *Jurisdiction*, not to be attempted by mere Probationers, not until they have been ordained, and solemnly called by some Congregation to take the Pastoral Charge of it. 'Tis therefore evident, that as long as they continue in the *probationary* State (and we are well informed, that is, sometimes, for many Years) there can be *no Discipline* in those Churches.

As to Lay-Elders, the other ruling Power in *many* Congregations, (for in *some*, it should seem, by *Heads of Agreement* in 1691, there were not any, as tis like also there are not now) here and there one, it may be, proud of his Office, and fond of the Power it gives him, may be busy enough in it. But for the generality, we may partly judge, by the Disposition of our Church-Wardens, (who are
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commonly Men of the same Rank) and that *Reluctancy* they often discover in making their Presentments, notwithstanding they are bound by their Oaths to do it, that, if they live in Amity with their Neighbours, they are not like to be very severe upon them; especially, if they are not only *Neighbours*, but also *Kindred*, or *good Customers*. But if there be any grudge between them, then the Censures of the Church will be in Danger of being *prostituted*, to serve the Purposes of Ill-will, Malice, and Revenge. At least, those that suffer under them will be apt to suppose, and give out, that *so* it is, whether it be, or not. Hence they will slight those Censures, grow refractory, unwilling to submit, and the more so, if these Elders happen to be Persons of mean Endowments, and small Experience, as, in many Congregations, they must be supposed to be, or much inferior, on all Worldly Accounts, to those whom they exercise Dominion over.

*Tune Syri, Damæ, aut Dionysi filius audes
Dejicere è saxo cives, aut tradere Cadmo?*

If any little Tradesman or Mechanick of a Lay-Elder should take upon him to call you, Sir, to Account for any Offence he should pretend or fancy you had given, I am ready to think, that, with all your Humility, you would be apt to spurn him, in those Words of our old Friend *Horace*, or some other like them; and look where you will, I am pretty confident you will find *Fact* exactly corresponding with my *Theory*.

But to proceed: We are not only charged with the *Want* of proper Discipline, but with *great Faults* in the Discipline we have. I will mention two or three. That Jurisdiction which (say you) ought to have been in the *Parish Priests* is often put into the Hands of *Lay-Chancellors*. Now,
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who would have thought that ever a Charge of this Nature would have been exhibited by any *Dissenter*, by one of those who have evidently taken much larger Strides in this *Sacrilegious Usurpation*, this *Profanation of a most dreadful Part of Christ's Government*, as, I think, one of you call it, than this amounts to. If *Lay-Chancellors* had been allowed to take upon themselves *settled Cures*, and to officiate therein, it would have been a Thing that might have deserved some declaiming. And yet, as much as this do *you*, permitting Men to occupy the Place of Pastors, in *settled* Congregations, to preach and pray constantly *before* them, sometimes, (as I noted before) many Years together, before their *pretended* Ordination. The Power of the Keys is also exercised in another-guise Manner by *Lay-Elders*, than by *Lay-Chancellors*. They are both pretty much upon a footing as to Scripture Warrant and Authority; and yet, your *Lay-Elders*, in the Plan of Presbyterian Church-Government, are an essential Part of all Consistories and Synods. They sit in them, and have an equal Vote with the Pastors, in all Business, both in the making of new Laws, and executing the old. Jointly with *him*, they *suspend* from the Lord's Table, they *excommunicate*, and they do it, too, by a Power which is supposed *inherent*, and properly their *own*; whereas *Lay-Chancellors* act by an Authority derived from the Bishop, and, in the Matter of Excommunication, only declare, as Civilians, what is Law, the Sentence being pronounced, as well in Court, as at Church, by Ecclesiastical Persons. — After all, there may be, perchance, some Irregularity on both Sides. On *yours*, it is never like to be taken away; on *ours*, it is taken away by *most* of my Lords the Bishops. And if it *never* be by *all*, I would desire to know, how it comes to pass, that *we* should

should be held so *guilty* for admitting the Jurisdiction of *Lay-Chancellors* in our Ecclesiastical Courts *only*, while *you* are perfectly blameless in not only allowing a much higher Jurisdiction of Laymen in your very Consistories and Synods, but of Lay-preaching and Lay-praying also in your publick Congregations, which, without question, is a much greater Abuse and Profanation.

You must be sensible, Sir, that this Charge may be fairly retorted upon *your Churches* of *all Denominations*, even those that are *called* and *are* Presbyterian (if, indeed, there *are* any such among you) but, in a more particular and especial Manner, upon those of the Congregational way. For *these* not only *connive* at the *Practice*, but openly *maintain* the *Right* of Lay-preaching and Praying, and Lay-ordination too. Nay, the whole Power of the Keys, according to *them*, is *originally* in the Lay-People, and they, accordingly, exercise, as there is Occasion, every Part of the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction. What Right, Sir, have *these* to reproach the Church (they are the last Men in the World that should reproach her) with her Lay-Chancellors, and to talk of a Profanation for only being assumed by the Bishop, not to do any Act that is *purely Spiritual*, but only to be his *Assistants* in his ecclesiastical and judicial Proceedings?

We are also, it seems, accountable (which is a little hard) for those *Prohibitions* with which our Discipline is sometimes embarrassed, and such other Restraints and Modifications thereof, as the *civil Powers* have been pleased, in some Cases, to lay it under. For these we are twitted by Mr. *Peirce*, who, jeeringly, tells us, *it is not owing to you, but to the Constitution of our Church, that we can make no Ecclesiastical Laws without the Consent of the Government.* It is well, Sir, for you that you can.

can. But why then do we see none of *your* making? And I would know, too, whom it is owing to, and whether it be not owing to the Constitution of Presbyterian Churches here in *England*, that they have no Presbyteries, Synods, and Assemblies. In his Dedication to the Church of *Scotland* of this very Book, wherein the Church of *England* is so upbraided, and insulted, for submitting to be limited by the Civil Powers, in making Ecclesiastical Constitutions, he has some distant obscure Innuendo's (as it appears to me) about this Matter. He talks there of a *Design* about the latter End of the last Century, to set up a general Correspondence among Dissenters, such as the Quakers have practised for many Years — of the ill Usage and Cavils of their Adversaries, of representing them as Despisers of the King's Power in Spirituals, which he gives as the Reason why the Order of their Churches is not more agreeable to that which is in Use in *Scotland*, and other reformed Churches. Methinks, Sir, a little *Eclaircissement* is needful in this Place: But if it be meant, as it seems to be, of a Design to set up Presbyteries, and Synods, which the Government would not permit them to do, here is submitting (since Submission is such a criminal Thing) to Limitations, and Prohibitions, on their Parts. But whether it be true, or not, that the Government will not permit them to have Synods, and other regular Assemblies of their Ministers, the *Fact*, that they have them *not*, is evident. And that must be own'd, by all true and genuine Presbyterians, a far greater defect in their Churches, and a fouler Disgrace to their Discipline, than any they can name in *ours*. For such Assemblies are the Characteristics, and constitute the very Essence of Presbyterian Churches; and for them to be without them is much the same Thing, as for Episcopal Churches to have no Bishops.

This Gentleman, Sir, has been pleased, too, to shew some of his *Smartness* upon another Article of our Discipline, to wit, *the Commutation of Penance*, which (to say true) many Conformists, as well as he, have been offended at, and the more, I presume, for not well understanding the Thing, and the Reason of it. It is a Privilege sometimes indulged to Persons of Condition, to redeem themselves from the Reproach and Shame of publick Penance, by a Sum, which is distributed to pious and charitable Uses: And this, if not *strictly* and *ecclesiastically* right, may yet be thought defensible, in the present State of Things. Mr. *Peirce* says, *it is turning Penance into a Money-business*. Well, be it so: Yet this *Money-business*, or (to speak out of *Sarcasm*) this *pecuniary Penalty* may have its use, and do some good. The levying a Shilling, according to the Statute, on any Person who does not repair to Church every Lord's Day, we may call, too, if we please, a *Money-business*; yet I have never heard, *that* Statute incurr'd the Displeasure, or fell under the Censure of any Dissenter, but have always thought *you* esteemed it a good Law, as *we* do, for securing the due Observation of that Day; few being willing to pay down, perhaps, the whole Earnings of one of the six Days, to purchase an absence from Church, on the Seventh. When a Man is obliged to pay down, for his Crimes, a greater Sum than he can well spare, it will make him take heed how he brings himself again into the like Snare, and help more to make him alter his Course of Life, than *looking Shame in the Face*, in a public Assembly, would be like to do. For tho' that, too, may have a good Effect upon *some Sorts* of Offenders, as well as be a Terror to *others* that are yet innocent, it would be apt to make *other sorts* of them, particularly, the Rich, and, especially,

especially, if they were proud and high-minded too, as the Apostle insinuates they are all apt to be, on account of their Riches, only the more impudently and desperately wicked. — However, this Sort of Punishment must be allowed better than none at all, and letting Offenders escape, as, I suppose, Sir, is commonly done among you, without *Penance* or *Commutation* either.

As to the antient Discipline, I am free to own, it did not allow of *Commutation*; and Mr. *Peirce* is much in the right, when he observes, *Ambrose was ignorant of it, when he forced the Emperor Theodosius to confess his Sin publickly in the Church.* Yes, truly, in those Times, the *Rich* and *Honourable*, as well as the *Poor* and *Base*, had *Humility* enough to submit to Ecclesiastical Censures, nor thought it a Thing beneath their Dignity and Rank to make an open Confession of their Sins, and to seek the Peace and Reconciliation of the Church, with Tears. And when it is so here in *England*, I shall not stick to say, “ Away with Commutations, nor let them be named among us. ” — I shall only add, these Commutations are entirely retrospective, and only Punishments for Offences, which Men have formerly committed, and, perhaps, have since repented of; and if they go on in their Sins, no such Favour, I hope, is ever allowed them, a second Time.

You have other Objections which may be as easily, as those I have already considered, retorted upon you. Shall I mention the *Ceremony* (as your Writers love to call it) of the *Surplice*? Or, shall I pass it by; supposing you are now ashamed of *the great Controversy of the Habits*, and have resigned all your Scruples about *this*, in particular? I almost fancy you have; but if you have *not*, you may be pleased to remember the *Ceremony* of the

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long sweeping black Cloak, peculiar to your Ministers, which is esteemed by *you*, and used by *them* as an Ecclesiastical Habit, for the Sake (you own) of its Significancy of Gravity, as the Surplice (you say) is used by *us*, for its being significant of Purity of Life, tho', by the bye, the Church has no where declared it to be used, on any such Account.

But the reading of certain Apocryphal Books in our Churches, while some Parts of the Scripture are omitted, to make (as you call it) Room for them, and even the binding them in the same Volume with the Scriptures, is, still, a Matter of mighty Offence. The binding them together makes them look (you think) as if the one was written by Inspiration of God, as well as the other, and of the same Authority with it. And yet the Common-Prayer is often found under the same Cover, while no body takes it (I dare say) to be the immediate Word of God, ever the more for *that*: Nor does any one take the Hymns and Doxologies that have sometimes been printed and bound up with the Psalms of *David*, for the Use of Psalmody, in *your* Churches, as well as *ours*, to be as Canonical, as those Psalms. I think, we have a Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs upon a great Variety of Divine Subjects, and some, particularly, for the Lord's Supper, composed by Dr. *Watts*, which he has bound up together with his *Paraphrases* or *Translations* of certain Portions of Scripture, for the Use of your Congregations, and the Improvement of the Psalmody thereof. Now, do your People, Sir, esteem those of his own Composure of the same Authority with the other, because he has thought proper to bind and publish them together? And, as to the reading the *Apocrypha* in our Churches, for *Example of Life, and Instruction of the*
Manners

Manners of the People, I know not why it should not be held, on all Accounts, as justifiable, as singing the Hymns and Songs of that Gentleman, for the Increase and Furtherance of their Devotion ^m. That Gentleman, I perceive, does not fall in *with the Taste and Inclination of those who think nothing must be sung unto God, but the Translations of his own Word*. And therefore, one would think he could not readily fall in with *their* Taste and Inclination, who would have nothing *read to the People*, besides the Translations of God's Word. And if some Part of Canonical Scripture be omitted *to make room* for reading the Apocryphal, so it is, (and, I think, with less Reason) *to make way* for singing the Hymns and Spiritual Songs beforementioned. If certain useful and instructive Parts of the *Apocrypha* are read, while long Genealogies, mysterious and obscure Prophecies in the Canonical Books, which the Learned themselves are puzzled with, are omitted, this is plainly done for the better Edification of the People, which you, who hold it right to forsake the Communion of the Church, only for better Edifying, could not (one would think) be displeased at. And the same may be said for omitting, in the Course of the Lessons, some other Holy and Canonical Scriptures, for Instance, the Song of *Solomon*, the reading of which, in a mixt and popular Assembly, by reason of its parabolical Turn, and peculiar Phrase, might be attended with some Inconvenience ⁿ. Mr. *Peirce*, I perceive, is for its being read, because, I suppose, the Church has *not* appointed it to be read: And if it *had* done so, I am pretty confident (such was the Temper and Spirit of that Gentleman) he would have been as much against it, and called the Synod ^o, in his jeering

^m See his Preface to Hymns and Spiritual Songs, p. 10.

ⁿ *Vindicat. of Dissenters*, P. 3. c. 13.

^o *Ibid.*

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way, a *wise* Synod, which had made such an Order and Appointment. We should, then, in all likelihood, have been told, that the greatest Part of all popular Congregations would certainly rest in the plain and literal, and never carry their Thoughts into, or reap any Advantage from the allegorical and spiritual Meaning of that Divine Song; that it would, therefore, be apter to cause disorderly Motions, and to provoke Mirth in light and unsettled Minds, than to excite Attention and Devotion; and been put in Mind of that Order among the *Jews*, that none should read it, even in private, 'till they were thirty Years old. — After all, it is not very seemly, or consistent, in this Gentleman and his Brethren, to censure the Church of *England* for not publicly reading the *whole* Scripture, if what is commonly said be true, that, in some of their *own* Congregations, *hardly any at all* is read, and little, comparatively, where any *is*. Mr. *Peirce* himself can't but acknowledge, ^p and does, that, *setting aside the Psalms, Epistles, and Gospels, more Scripture is read in two Months in our Churches, than is done in a Year, in their largest Meetings*. Only he says, they read them more in their Families, which may be true or otherwise, for what either he, or I know; especially, now a-days, when Family Prayer and reading the Scriptures are not so much used as heretofore, ^q and a greater Degeneracy in Proportion, in these Respects, is reigning and visible among you, than your conforming Neighbours. And it should be remembred, too, how many Families there are of the poorer Sort, who have no Bible to read at home, and cannot read it, if they had.

Keeping the *Feasts* and *Fasts* of the Church is another Stumbling-block in the Way to Confor-

^p *Ibid.*

^q *Watt's Humble Attempt*, p. 223.

mity;

mity; when, too, it is notorious, that, in the Church of *England*, no body, now, need keep them, unless they chuse it, and that the Way of keeping them is neither more nor less, than going to Church to say our Prayers, to commemorate some of the special Mercies of God towards us, in regard to our Redemption, and to hear the Scriptures read relative thereto, and to praise God for the Doctrine and Examples of his holy Apostles, and other Saints, who were the glorious Instruments of conveying the Knowledge of *Jesus Christ* to us. One would wonder how any intelligent Dissenter can be offended at *this*, more than he is at those Days of *Solemn Thanksgiving* to Almighty God for his Mercies and Blessings of a temporal or civil Nature, or even those *Lectures*, that are weekly, or occasionally preach'd at your Meeting. — And as to keeping the Festival of our Lord's Nativity, which has been more particularly objected to, you seem not to have, now-a-days, so far as my Observation reaches, *any Scruples at all* about the *feasting Part*, which is certainly the most exceptionable, but come as *cheerfully* into it, as your conforming Neighbours, and only *stick* at the *Religious*. And you stick at *this*, it seems, because you are not certain our Lord was born on that Day on which the Church celebrates his Nativity. But see, Sir, your Inconsistence and Partiality. — In the second Century, there was a great Controversy between the Eastern and Western Churches, about the *right* Day of keeping Easter. *This* Mr. Peirce calls *an idle Contest*, and whenever any of your Ministers have Occasion to speak of it, they represent it after the same manner, and never fail to slur the Fathers of the Church, as a Company of simple, unreasonable, and perverse Men, for raising such Stirs, and

² *Vindicat. of Dissenters*, Part 3. ch. 11. p. 226.

making

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making a Schism about so poor a Point as keeping Easter on *this*, or on *that* Day. But, how comes it, then, to pass, that their keeping *Easter* on a *wrong* Day was so *small* a Matter, if our keeping *Christmas* on a *wrong* (supposing we really do) is so *great* a one; and how are those Fathers to be blamed for contending and making a Schism about the former, if you, and your Brethren are without blame, when you justify your Schism by the latter.

I trust now I have plainly shewn you, that your most popular Arguments against Communion with the Church are insufficient, and, besides, that they equally press against Communion with your *own* Churches: And the Matter, as one would imagine, might be safely rested *here*. But there may be, perhaps, one Scruple or Difficulty behind; and tho', from the Tenor of that just and reasonable Declaration you made to me, which gave Occasion to *this*, and the *former* Letter, I should hope it would be no Difficulty with *you*, yet, for fear it should, and lest it should rise in your Mind, as a Retreat and Subterfuge to avoid Conformity, when you are fairly beaten out of your other Holds and Fastnesses, it may not be improper to say to it just so much as may be thought sufficient either to prevent, or to remove it.

The Scruple or Difficulty is, *the Danger of giving Offence, by Conformity, to weak Brethren*. When the vulgar and more ignorant Sort of Dissenters plead *this*, they mean no more by giving them Offence than making them *angry*, or putting them *out of Humour*, or, at most, *grieving* them, or giving them some *Trouble* or *Concern*, which, (they say) by *all* Means should be avoided. No surely, not by *all* Means avoided; not (for Example) by *offending* God, in doing ought that is contrary to their Duty, or neglecting to do ought that Duty requires
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of them. Let us go and learn this Lesson, that we are to *please*, as well as *obey God*, rather than *Man*. In the mean while, it is Matter of Wonder, that, since they are so afraid of offending *Men*, no Consideration at all should be had of offending *us*, their Brethren of the Church of *England*, who are, unquestionably, *many more in Number* (tho' we may not perhaps, pique ourselves so much upon account of our *Weakness*) and, 'tis like, are as much *grieved* and *concerned*, if not quite so *angry* and *displeased*, at their *Non-conformity*, as their Dissenting Brethren could be, at their *Conformity* to the Church.

As to *you*, Sir, (I dare say) you have no Scruple of this Sort; I mean, no Fear or Apprehension of offending, in *this* Sense of offending, by your Conformity, but are as much (as indeed all should be) above the Fear of displeasing any Man whatsoever, by embracing the Communion of the Church of *England*, when you shall come to think, it is, in itself, a right Thing to do so, as you are above the Weakness of imagining, you ought to continue, rather than displease, in your present Separation from it. The true Scripture-Notion of *Offending* you are not, I suppose, unapprized of: It is neither more or less than setting a *Trap*, or *Gin*, to ensnare any one, or laying a *stumbling Block* in his Way, to occasion his falling into Sin; and I can easily conceive how *you*, or *any* Man of Sense, may inconsiderately fall into an Opinion, that, by his Conformity, some weak *Christians* may be led, or drawn into Sin. A Gentleman, like *you*, of considerable Sway, Authority, and Influence in the Place where he lives, or a Minister in great Reputation and Esteem, may conceive, that his Conformity to the Church would be a Hurt to Religion, that many who had before a high Opinion of his Wisdom and Integrity, seeing his Compliance, which they

might hold to be sinful, and, perhaps, also, suspect to proceed from other Motives than a real Conviction of the Lawfulness thereof, might be thereby tempted, and the more easily reconciled, to give way, upon occasion, to sinful Compliances in *other* Instances, and, perhaps, also, in *the very same*, conforming, as *he* does, without having received the same Satisfaction concerning the Lawfulness of it which *he* has; which would be a Sin. And I verily believe some of your Ministers themselves keep off from the Communion of the Church, and go on in the Ways of Separation, meerly upon this Scruple. They could well enough conform, but do it not, lest People should be scandalized thereat, and Religion receive Damage: And if, among these, there should be found *one* of distinguish'd Learning and Abilities, as well as other Merit, who would not wonder, and be grieved at it?

It is not, indeed, a new Thing for the greatest Men (as if they were under some Enchantment) not to know how to get out of certain particular Tracks of thinking, tho' they be ever so evidently and palpably wrong; and that the Way of thinking which these Gentlemen are in, is thus palpably wrong, you will soon be (I hope) made sensible. You don't think it, I suppose, a thing *scandalous in itself* to *live* in the Communion of our Church; and when 'tis considered, that *you* say, *yourselves*, you differ little from the Church in Matters of Doctrine, but only in Ceremonies and external Rites, I hope it will not be thought any great Matter of Offence to *come over* to it. And, indeed, why it should be thought a greater Offence for one of *you* to come over to *us*, than you esteem it for one of *us* to go over to *you*, I can't readily comprehend. I could never observe, that any Conversions from *our* Church to *yours* were a Grief to you, or that
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any of you ever *discouraged* them, for fear of their *giving Offence to weak Consciences* ; but on the contrary, have always observed, they were Matter of *great Satisfaction and Content*, and always the greater, by how much the Persons were more eminent and considerable in the Church, and their Change, (consequently) likely to prove more scandalous. Which evidently shews (as one would think) you have no great Notion, that a *bare* Change is any reasonable Occasion of Offence. Circumstances, I allow, in particular Cases, may be such as shall make it so, as when one conforms with manifest Views of Covetousness, or Ambition, or any other Views of a like Sort. But, in the Case of most private *Christians*, and particularly your own, there is little room for any such Suspicion ; and where there is more, as perhaps there may be in the Case of Ministers conforming, if they are really apprehensive of any such Offence being taken at it, it may be, methinks, easily prevented, by publishing the Reasons for their Conformity, and openly declaring (if they intend to keep their Words) they will not accept any Dignities or Preferments in the Church so much above the Value of what they enjoy at present, as a reasonable Man can suspect was a Temptation to them, or any Motive and Inducement to their Change. And if they think not fit to lay themselves under any Limitations of that Sort, as being conscious of Abilities to do God eminent Service in the higher Stations of the Church, with a sincere Desire and full purpose of Heart to do him the best they can, and shall be, by his Providence, and the Favour of their Superiors, called to them, I know not why they should decline them, seeing it is in their Power to prevent any Scandal from ensuing, by a constant and regular Conformity, Diligence, and Faithfulness in their high and holy

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Calling,

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Calling, an humble un-aspiring Mind and Temper, a Conduct on all Occasions, perfectly disinterested, and an exemplary Life. And if, Sir, you will look about you, you will see Instances, * more than one, of Gentlemen who have *thus* conformed, who, far from scandalizing any by their Conformity, enjoy their Preferments and high Stations in the Church with the Applause, and live in the Esteem and Veneration of *all*, even of *those whom they have deserted*. And what *these* have done, *others*, certainly, *may* do, if *they* also conform upon *Principle*; and with the same *Purity of Intention* to serve God in the sacred Ministry of this Church; and any other than such we desire to have nothing to do with.

As to offending many, who may be moved, by the Opinion they have of you, to follow your Example, there really appears to me little Room for any *Fears and Apprehensions* of that Nature. For your People, Sir, whatever, in other Respects, they may be, are not observed, in this, to be like Sheep, that when one leaps the Fold, the rest follow; but, on the contrary, when any eminent Member, or learned Minister of your Churches comes to see he has Reason, and does, accordingly, resolve, to conform, the People, tho' they had before the highest Opinion of his Wisdom and Goodness, and, implicitly relied upon his Authority, generally *turn their Backs* on him, and bid him go take *his own Course*, while they pursue *theirs*, and few follow him, unless it be *with Censures and Réproaches* for his leaving them. These are the only Sins which his Conformity is like to lead them into, which, however, *they*, and not *he* must be answerable for. But if more were to follow his Example, I really think, Sir, it would be so much the better;

* Bishop of O——d, &c.

and heartily wish to God, you were, all, offended, after that Manner! For if his Authority were to draw you after him, that would be so far from a *real* Offence, that it would be the very *reverse* of it; so far from *leading* you into Sin, that it would plainly be *plucking* you out of it. And indeed, whoever of you comes to be satisfied in his Mind of the Lawfulness of Conformity, and to think it his Duty, can do no less than endeavour, and take all Opportunities to satisfy others of it, and if he has been, any way, the Means of *perverting* them to, or *strengthening* and *confirming* them in their Non-conformity, he is bound, in Duty, to take *some Pains* to bring them off from it. I am, aware, you will say, you are only afraid of their following your Example, *against their Judgments*, and with a *doubting Conscience*. But be easy, Sir, I entreat you, upon that Head. For 'tis as well, and indeed better, they should follow you to *Church*, whither they ought to follow you, with a *doubting Conscience*, than, *with the same*, follow you to the *Meeting*, whither they ought not, as some in all probability, *now* do; who either moved by your Authority, or influenced by the Hopes of recommending themselves to you, or the Fear of displeasing, and losing the Share they may already have in your Affections, keep off from the Church, which, otherwise, they would have resorted, and adhered to. Either way, (you see) by your Conformity or Non-conformity, some or other *may be* offended; and, in such a Case, what is your Duty to do, but to conform, if, upon other Accounts, you think *that* right, leaving Contingencies and Possibilities, which you can neither foresee nor prevent, and are not, therefore, answerable for, to the Care and Consciences of others who may be immediately concerned in them.

I must

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I must not dismiss this Head, without reminding you of one great *Scandal* which is *really given* by your Non-conformity, or those unhappy *Dissensions* that are kept up by you amongst us. They are a mighty *Offence* to *Jews, Turks, and Infidels*, and give them unworthy *Thoughts* of our Holy Religion. And those among ourselves who are disposed to think meanly or dishonourably of it, how do they triumph in them, and with what *Pomp and Aggravation* set them out to the World, as if they really thought them a sufficient *Disproof* of *Christianity* itself, or, at least, a legitimate *Prejudice* against it? And the *Papist*, in regard to the *Religion of Protestants*, makes the same Use of them that the *Free-Thinker* does, in reference to *Christianity in the gross*. The one will not be a *Christian*, because *Christians* are *so divided*; and because *Protestants* are *so divided*, the other will be no *Protestant*. He is always counting up, with *Pleasure*, our *Heresies and Schisms*, and from thence arguing, that his Church is the one *Catholic and Apostolic Church*, and there *can be* no other. No less a Man than the late *Monsieur De Meaux* argues, at this Rate, against no less an one than our late excellent *Bishop Bull*. *Is the Catholick Church* (says he) *a confused Heap of Societies, separated the one from the other?* And how can they be that *Kingdom of Christ* not divided against itself, and which never shall perish! And *Truth* (says another, tho' not so great as he) cannot possibly be among us; for *Truth* is but *one*, and when Men have deviated from *that*, the *Maze of Error* is infinite. Our *Divisions* are set forth, too, as the just *Judgments of God*, for having forsaken the *Communion of his Church*; and as this Church and Nation is the chief *Support*, and strongest *Sanctuary* of the *Protestant Religion*,

¹ *Milletiere.*

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it is (*quoth he*) more lamentably divided than almost any other. In this Manner (*vain Man!*) *he* argues; and no one thing, I am persuaded, has helped more to confirm those of *his* Church in their old Errors, and given them more unconquerable Aversions to our Religion, than our Dissentions have: As, on the other hand, nothing has more help'd to unsettle the Minds of some of our own People, and make them Converts to Popery. And, accordingly, it was observed, that, in the late miserable Times, when the Church of *England* was removed, and an innumerable Spawn of Heresies and Schisms of various Forms and Hues covered the Land, not a few, and, of these, some of no mean Rank and Quality, or of no small Account for Learning, scandalized at our Divisions, went clean off from the Religion of Protestants to that corrupt Church, as the only Place (they thought) wherein they could hope to find either Truth, or Peace. I beseech you, Sir, *by the Mercies of God, and in the Bowels of our Lord Jesus Christ*, lay these Things seriously to Heart. Consider the Mischief you are doing by your Dissention, to our Holy Religion, and to the Protestant Profession in particular, which you always express so tender a regard for; and when your Mind is forming to itself *imaginary* Dangers of some People's *taking Offence* at your embracing the Communion of the Church of *England*, for God's Sake, reflect, that, by your separating from it, you do *really give an Offence* that is *infinitely greater*, and more *mischievous*.

And now, Sir, I flatter myself it plainly appears to you, and will to any other candid and unprejudiced Dissenter, into whose Hands these Papers may happen to fall, that this Scruple or Difficulty also is both easily answered, and retorted. And therefore

fore I hope you will now think of acquitting yourself of the Promise you gave me, *that you would and should think it your Duty rather to conform to the Church of England, than join yourself to any separate Congregation, in Case the common Arguments against Conformity could either be fairly answered, or fairly reflected.*

It was a Pleasure to me, to hear a Gentleman talk of *the Duty of Conforming* in any Case, as it shews, he is not got into the modern, latitudinarian, fashionable way of thinking, that there is no such Thing as *Duty* in relation to that Matter, but that every one is as much at Liberty (without any regard to Terms of Communion) to be of what Church he pleases, as he is to go to what Tavern, or be of what Club he likes best. No wonder, that Libertines and Rakes, who commonly make their Religion (what they have of it) out of their own Heads, should fall in with and embrace such a Notion: But we find it embraced by many who regard the Bible, as the Rule of their Lives and Conducts, and abundance of Pains is taken, more especially by those of *your Way*, to give it a Currency in the World. It must be confessed, 'tis a Notion admirably calculated to serve the Purposes of all *Gatherers of Churches out of Churches*: Tho', methinks, too, the Notion is not very compatible with that Zeal and Industry they commonly discover in carrying on that Work; for, if all Churches and Communions are indifferent, I know not why any one should give himself the least Trouble in making Profelytes from one to another; and, if he believed in his Heart they *really were* so, you may depend upon it, he would *not* do it, unless Avarice, Ambition, Faction, or some other worldly Interest were at Bottom.

I make no Question but you have often heard it
said,

said, as I sometimes have, *that no body will be ask'd what Church he was of at the Day of Judgment.* Surely, a very strange Saying! For, most certainly, it *will* then be enquired, not only how we have lived and behaved, as Men, but also, how we have behaved as *Christians*, as Members of the Church, and Subjects of the Kingdom of *Christ*. — Suppose I should go about to seduce you, or any other Gentleman, into Treason, or actual Rebellion against his Majesty, in Favour of a Pretender to his Crown, and, for reconciling your Conscience to it, should tell you, you need not fear involving your Souls in any Guilt, and endangering your Salvation, for that *no body will be ask'd what King he was for at the Day of Judgment*, would not you be ready to fly in my Face, as a profligate and abandoned Casuist, and very unfit to have the Care of Souls? Yes, you would: Now, there is just as much Sense, Honesty, and Divinity, in bearing you in hand, that *it will never be enquired, in that Day, what Church you were of*, to make your Conscience easy in the way of Schism. And whoever shall attempt, under such Colours as these, to entice Men into Treason, or Rebellion, on the one hand, or into Schism, on the other, must be a Man either so weak, or so wicked, as to be very unfit to have the Direction of Mens Consciences.

We have known Scripture, most absurdly and ridiculouſly quoted, in Support of that Notion, *viz.* to shew, that no body need be concerned about *this* or *that* Religion, and less still, *this* or *that* Church, or Communion of *Christians*, but only provide for a good Life; as, particularly, that Declaration of St. Peter, *in every Nation he that feareth God, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted of him.* No doubt but whoever fears God, and works Righteousness, as Cornelius *did*, will be accepted, as Cor-

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nelius

nelius *was*; that is, his Righteousness will recommend him to God, may be a Means to procure him some farther Grace, and, perhaps, to bring him, if he be a Gentile, as it did that *Roman Soldier*, to the Knowledge of the Truth, as it is in *Jesus*. Or, if it be supposed that *Acceptance unto Salvation* is here meant, I shall move no Controversy about *that*, provided the Phrases *fearing God, and working Righteousness*, be but interpreted fairly, in their just Latitude and Extent, so as to take in walking in *all* the Ways of God's Holy Laws, and *all* the Works of his Commandments. For *so* interpreted, they will not fit those who break one of his first and great Commandments, by sowing Divisions, and causing Divisions and Offences in his Church. — But I see I am running, and that needlessly, from my Subject, there being, I am satisfied, no Danger you will ever be caught into an Opinion of the Indifferency of all Churches and Communion, by so crude a Saying, and such a palpable Misapplication of Scripture, in Support of it, as I have now mentioned. All the Danger is of your falling rather into the other Opinion, of the Necessity of separating from any Church, as particularly ours, for slight and insufficient Reasons, too weak to bear the Weight and Strefs of such a formal and total Separation, as is laid upon them.

Since I have happened to pass this Censure upon the Insufficiency of those Reasons, which are commonly urged in Justification of your Dissent, and pronounced them *too weak to bear the Strefs that is laid upon them*, you may, perhaps, be desirous to know, what really *is*, in my Opinion, sufficient to justify such a Separation as yours is; nor shall I be unwilling to add a Word or two, for the farther Explanation of my Sense of that Matter. I am not, Sir, afraid to assert, that nothing will justify your
 Separ-

Separation, but the imposing of sinful Terms of Communion *upon the Laity*. Upon the Laity, I say again, that you may remark it. You, Sir, who are Laics, may very honestly and conscientiously come to Church, and say your Prayers with us, whether the Gentlemen, your Ministers, *could* or could *not* make the usual Subscription and Declaration, or take the Oath of Canonical Obedience to the Bishop, and whether they *had*, or had *not* Reason to refuse it. 'Tis evident, you have no manner of concern in those Things. And if those who *would be* Ministers hold it unlawful to comply with them; they may let it alone, and betake themselves to some other Profession, or way of Life, wherein they may eat their Bread with a quiet Conscience, and Gladness of Heart, and not be disquieted with Remorse, either for complying on the one hand, with the Conditions of Ministerial Conformity against their Judgments, or for disturbing, on the other, the Peace of the Church, for the Sake of a Maintenance. No body, Sir, goes about to compel these Gentlemen to enter into the Ministry: No body *wants* or *desires* them to do it. We are enough, of ourselves, to answer all the Wants and Occasions of the Church; or, if more Labourers were wanting, we could have them, and such, too, as believe and contend, that the Terms of their Ministerial Conformity are lawful, and may be very conscientiously complied with. And as to those who are already in the Ministry among you, let them shew their Christian Fortitude in trusting to God to provide for them, while they attend our Churches in the Character of Laymen, as they well know many of the old Non-conformists, their pretended Fathers, and many also of our Clergy lately did, when they could not comply with the State Oaths that were required of them, in order to the

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Exercise of their Ministry; and not cover themselves with the Pretence of a *Woe unto them if they preach not the Gospel*, which has no Relation to *their* Case. And this, surely, tho' it were ever so inconvenient on any worldly Account, rather than make so fearful a Schism in the Church, it is their Duty to do, unless they believe that the Terms of Lay-communion are sinful also. But this I don't perceive is pretended. On the contrary, Dr. Calamy himself expressly says, *The Terms of Communion with the establish'd Church are not pretended to be sinful absolutely*. All he contends for is, that they are so *respectively*, or by Reason (as I suppose he means) of present Circumstances and Conjunctures. But, surely, those Circumstances and Conjunctures must be very extraordinary that can justify such a Schism, upon account of Things which, all the while, are confessed to be *materially* lawful. At this rate, they may make any thing, or whatever they please, unlawful. For 'tis only saying, that in regard to Circumstances and Conjunctures (which Imagination will easily frame and invent) or by reason of the Temper of the present Times, the State of Things, or Disposition of Persons, they hold it necessary, or very adviseable to oppose it. And when it is once thought adviseable to resist and oppose it, complying with it, be sure, will soon be a Crime, and presently commence *respectively* sinful.

In the Enquiry, therefore, whether the present Separation be justifiable, I look upon all to be impertinent, and quite foreign to the Business in hand, that does not, or is not pretended to shew, that the Church requires, as a Term of Communion, of the Laity, something that is sinful. And would your Ministers proceed in this way, let them write on, in the Name of God, and spare not. But heaping together a few Matters, which are only, perhaps,

perhaps, inconvenient, or of small Use, but are not pretended to be sinful, or any way destructive of Salvation, and proposing *them* to the People, as a sufficient Ground for their Separation, is a most *unreasonable*, an *unscriptural*, and *uncatholic* Proceeding. It is not enough, to say, there are in the Church some Defects, some Abuses have grown up in it, and *this* and *that* might have been ordered better than it is. This may, possibly, be the Case, in some few Particulars, in our Church, as, doubtless, it is in all other Churches, and, among *them*, in your *own*. And if it be, you are welcome to use your Endeavours, that those Defects may be supplied, or Irregularities reformed. But, for God's Sake, Sir, let it be in a Christian and peaceable way, I mean, with keeping in the Communion of the Church; and that, I'll venture to say, would afford you greater Opportunities and Advantages, and give you more Power and Influence than you can now possibly have for bringing about the Regulations you desire, and, in all likelihood, be, at last, if they are fit and reasonable, a Means to effect them. But whether those Things be ever regulated, or not, People are not to be taught, that a few such Matters will justify your Separation in God's Sight. This Doctrine, I must take the Liberty to say, is *false* and *dangerous*. And to teach it is just the same Thing, as if you were to collect and put together some of the common Errors and Miscarriages of Government, or a few unequal and inconvenient Laws, and made a Book of them, and then call it, *A Vindication of your withdrawing your Allegiance from his Majesty, and taking up Arms against him*.

That the accumulating small Defects and Irregularities, (often only *imaginary* ones) is your common and most approved Way of attacking our

Church, and justifying your Separation from it, is evident from your Books, and particularly, from your *Plain Reasons for Dissenting from the Communion of the Church of England*. This is the Way and Manner of that Book, which, nevertheless, by the many Impressions it has had, one may easily judge is approved by the Body of Dissenters, as a just Vindication of your Dissention. The supercilious Ignorance of its Author, in divers Particulars, has been properly chastised, and sufficiently exposed in a small Pamphlet lately published. Several of his Reasons I have already retorted upon yourselves; but there is yet one which I have, methinks, a great Inclination to take some Notice of here, tho', perhaps, it may be out of Place, as I have given you, before, some hopes of having made an End, and said the utmost I could against you. For we Letter-writers, Sir, have a Privilege, which I have, at this Time, a Mind to claim, of setting down our Thoughts as they offer themselves, without scrupulously adhering to strict and close Method. He has then (I say) one Reason which it may be proper to take Notice of, because it labours under the same Misfortune with those I have before been considering, being *weak* in itself, and yet, with the *little Force* it has, *recoiling* upon the Reasoner's Head.—*We leave* (says he) *the Communion of the Church of England, because, it has often shewn a persecuting Spirit*. 'Tis well he can't say, it has shewn a *dividing* Spirit, and *actually divided* itself, by an open Schism, from a sound Part of the *Catholic Church*, and that, too, establish'd by all the Authority in being. That indeed, would have been an unanswerable Reason for your Dissenting, worth all the rest in his Book. But what intelligent *Christian*, or sensible Man would ever say, that its *having often shewn a persecuting Spirit*

Spirit was a *plain Reason* for your Dissenting from it? Did the Church persecute, at any Time, its own Members? Were you, or your Fathers ever persecuted, while they continued in the Church? And were they driven out of it by those Persecutions? Was their being persecuted, the *Cause* of their Separation, and not rather the *Effect* and *Consequence* thereof? Or is it meant, that its having, in *former Times*, persecuted *others*, was a sufficient Cause for *your* leaving it *now*? Its having been *formerly* severe upon those that are *without*, is that a Reason why those who are *now within*, should go out, and forsake its Communion? I take upon me, Sir, absolutely to deny, that its being *now* (if it really was) of a persecuting Spirit, or its *actual* Persecution, *at this very Time*, of any, is a sufficient Ground for any one's renouncing its Communion; nor would I renounce the Communion of the very Church of *Rome*, solely on account of its Persecutions, great and many as they *have been*, or may *now* be, and if its manifold Indolatries, and other Terms of Communion, downright sinful, which it imposes upon *all*, *Laitie* as well as *Clergy*, did not oblige me to it. But our Churches having *formerly* (if it ever did) *persecuted* any, when it is not pretended to do so *now*, has not so much as the *Shew* of a good Reason for Dissenting. But let it be thought, Sir, as good an one as you please, since it is *equally good*, nay, truly, *better*, against your *own* Churches, whether called *Presbyterian*, or *Independent*: For each of these discovered, in the Day of their Power, as much, and, indeed, more, of that Spirit. There is not the least Appearance of *our* Church's having disquieted and oppressed any, on account of Religion, for more, now, than half a Century; and it has given thereby good Proof, that it is not *now*, whatever it may have been *heretofore*, of a *persecuting*

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cuting Spirit. And tho' many Individuals among you are, doubtless, averse, equally perhaps, with yourself, or with the Church of *England*, to all manner of Persecution, yet we cannot be sure the same Christian and equitable Spirit would appear in *your Churches*, acting *collectively*, on any Occasion where they should have full Scope to shew *what Manner of Spirit they were of*. The Presumption, I think, lies rather *against* them, and will lie, 'till they get uppermost again, and have thereby an Opportunity to let *their Moderation be known to all Men*. — So, Sir, you see, this Reason is not only *as strong*, but really *stronger* against Communion with *your Churches*, than with *ours*.

I protest to you, Sir, I cannot but marvel, that these Gentlemen are not more afraid to scatter among you such Reasons (and, I suppose, they are the best they have) for dissenting, as, with the least turn of Thought, may be employed against themselves. This, surely, is great Temerity, or very unwise Management, unless it may be supposed they are so well acquainted with the stubborn Prejudices of their People, that they can safely rely upon them, and be assured, that whatever Reasons shall be offered them they will *accept as good*, without giving themselves the Trouble to sift and examine them, or view them in any other Light than they shall think proper to place them in. But for my own Part, I don't think you are all such Folks, and hope better Things of many of you. And as we are told by Monsieur *Pascal* of a certain Free-thinking Gentleman, saying to one of his Infidel Companions, *If you dispute at this rate*, you'll certainly make me a *Christian*, so, if these Gentlemen, your Ministers, *reason at this rate*, in Support of your Separation, I shall have great Hopes they will make not only you, but many others, good Churchmen.

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For indeed, Sir, I am greatly mistaken, if I have not shewn, that their great and most popular Reasonings in the Defence of it, are frivolous and insufficient; and if now, at last, they appear so to *you*, Conformity; you must own, will be your Duty. If you think I have *failed* in *this* Part, and that your Objections, notwithstanding all I have said, are still good; yet, if you judge I have succeeded in the other Part, if you now find your Objections pinch yourselves, as much as *us*, if you plainly perceive (as now I hope you do) there are in *your* Churches, Inexpediences for Inexpediences, Defects for Defects, Blemishes for Blemishes, Irregularities and Abuses for Abuses and Irregularities in *ours*, your Obligation to Conformity still remains. In such a Case, you can't pretend any Obligation upon Conscience to oppose the establish'd Religion, by forming Parties against it, or by withdrawing your own Submission from it, but may as well conform, as dissent. And then, there are many *external Considerations*, and *Views of public Utility*, which will make it your *Duty*, and should *determine* you to do so. Your Conformity, Sir, to the establish'd Religion (*in that Case*) is but shewing a proper Deference and Respect to the Laws, and publick Wisdom of your Country. It will be adding Strength and Security to the Government (for the establish'd Religion has been always esteemed the Pillar and Support of it, and be promotive of *civil Peace*. And as the *establish'd* is also the *general* Religion; embraced and professed by *the vast Majority of the People*, your falling in and complying with *that* will be pursuing the truest, the surest and most effectual, as well as the most compendious Way for the restoring and establishing *Christian* Peace and Unity among us. It will be doing *your* Part towards putting an End to those Divisions that

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have so long troubled us, and bringing about that happy Union among us, which all good Christians and Protestants so ardently wish for, and pant after. These Considerations, which are of great Moment, I leave, Sir, upon your Mind, and earnestly commend you to God's Holy Guidance and Direction.

I am, Sir,

Your most Humble Servant,

*Nayland,
April, 19th 1745.*

JOHN WHITE.

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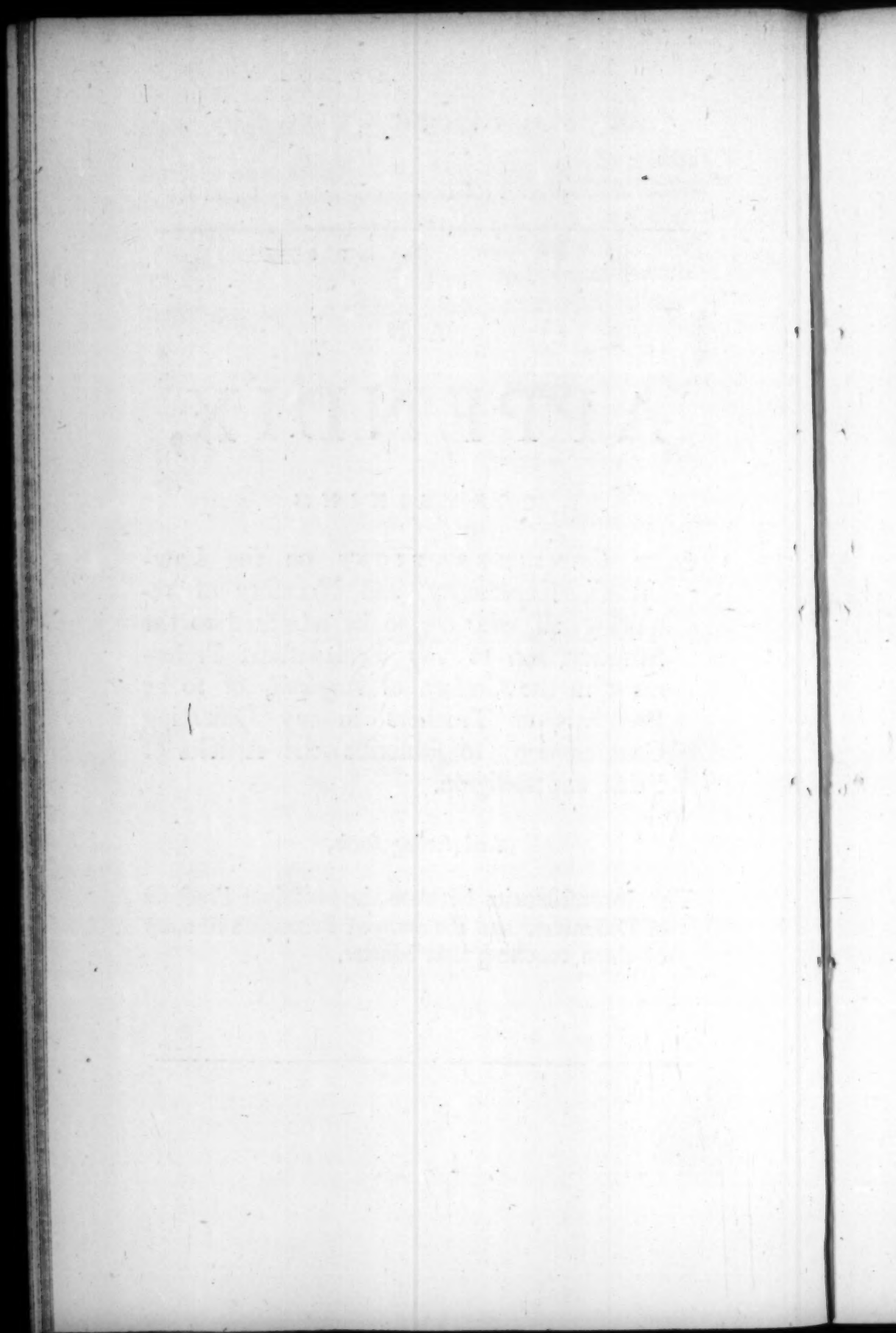
APPENDIX,

CONTAINING

Some CONSIDERATIONS on the Lawfulness, Expediency, and Necessity of requiring all who are to be admitted to the Ministry, or to any Ecclesiastical Preferment in the Church of *England*, or to be Preachers or Teachers in any Dissenting Congregation, to subscribe the Articles of Faith and Religion.

And setting forth,

The Inconsistencies between the notorious Practises of Dissenters, and the avowed Principles of *many* of them touching that Matter.



A P P E N D I X.

IN the *Second and Third Letters to a Gentleman Dissenting from the Church of England*, I have been retorting the most popular Reasons of Dissenters against Conformity, upon themselves. But because Subscription, (I mean *simple* Subscription without regard to the Matter of it) altho' grievously exclaimed against by *many* Dissenters, is not yet alledged (so far as I know) by any Dissenting Writer, as a Reason against so much as Ministerial, and much less against Lay-Conformity to the Church, I thought it would be proper to reserve the Consideration of their practical Contradictions to their own Principles touching this Matter, to a Place by itself. And I have done it the rather, because what I have to offer upon this Head will not affect *all* the Dissenters, but only *a Part* of them, as will appear, in the Sequel, more at large. After premising, therefore, some Things concerning the Lawfulness, the Expediency, and Necessity of Subscription to Articles of Religion, required of those who would be received into the Ministry, I shall represent the professed Principles and Sentiments of *divers* Dissenters concerning that Matter, shewing that they esteem it a most unwarrantable Thing, and yet, at the same Time submit, and do, of their own accords, other Things that are tantamount to it.

We hear, at every Turn of the Unreasonableness and intolerable Harshness of such Subscription, and how barbarous it is *to stretch the Consciences of Men to the Length of our own Notions*. This, we must know, is an ingenious Allusion to the famous
 Story

Story of the *Attic* Robber. And, in good Truth, it was an unhandsome thing to serve Strangers in the Manner they say he did. But if, instead of *dragging* them to his Bed, and *forcing* them to lie in it, and then cutting or stretching them to the Length of it, he had provided for them a great Variety of Beds, and bid every Man chuse for himself, according to his Stature, and take his Rest, he had never been the Theme and Execration of School-Boys; but would have passed in the World, and been transmitted down to us, for a most friendly and hospitable Person. And if any, out of a foolish Ambition to lie in the richest Bed, while there were others *as warm*, and *more easy*, should *secretly*, and *without the Knowledge of his Host*, either *lop* or *stretch*, and put himself to *Torture*, to make himself *even* with it, he could only have blamed his own Folly. The Application of this is mighty easy. We have in *England* Religions good Store; and if the Established does not suit the Size and Fashion of any ones Conscience, he is at Liberty to accommodate himself with another that may suit it better. But if, for covetous or ambitious Ends, he *will needs* be promoted in the establish'd Church, and for that End, *will* violate and give a *secret* Wound to his Conscience by *fraudulent* Subscriptions, I know not whom he should blame but himself. I hope, *not* the Church, which he thus infamously deceives, and imposes upon by his Prevarication.

Sometimes we are ask'd, what Directions there are in Scripture concerning Ministers subscribing Articles of Faith, and what Warrant and Authority we have *there* for such a Practice. Why, the Scriptures require Ministers *to take heed to their Doctrine, to shew Uncorruptness in it, and to hold the Mystery of Faith in a good Conscience*; and that the Church may have some Assurance of their doing so, or-

tain, that they be *first proved*, and then admitted to their Office, *being found blameless*, 1 Tim. iii. 10. where the Apostle plainly intimates, and even in-joins some Trial and Probation of those who are to be advanced to the Ministry, as well in reference to their *holding the Mystery of Faith*, as to their keeping a *good Conscience*. But the Form and Method of Probation not being determined, that is evidently left to the Determinations of human Prudence, and the Discretion of Church Governors. And then, the Subscription-way, I guess, may be as *prudently* taken, as any other. The Church of *England* has chosen this way: The Church of *Scotland* has done the same, obliging all, not only before they are ordained, but before they are licensed to pray and preach as Probationers, to sign the *Westminster Confession*; and all the Protestant Churches beyond the Seas prove the Faith of their Candidates for the Ministry, either by Subscriptions, or solemn Oaths, or both, which they repeat upon divers Occasions. And some of these, particularly those of *France*, had got far beyond *us* in the Matter of Subscription, and carried it to other-guise Heights than is done here, as whoever will turn over Mr. *Quick's Synodicon* will plainly see. And if Subscription was no way founded on the Word of God, it is plainly dictated by common Sense, which cries loudly, that the Church has a Right to demand it, and that none need make any Scruple to comply with it. For what is more evident to common Sense than this, that *those to whom the Depositum of the Christian Faith is committed should be themselves sound in the Faith, and give proper Evidence of their being so to those who are to put that Trust into their Hands*; and this again, that *none need make any Difficulty to subscribe with their Hands what they really believe with their Hearts*.

As

As to the Expediency and Necessity of such Subscription, that is as great and evident as the Expediency and Necessity of preserving the Honour and Reputation of the Church, and the Purity of Religion, by preventing Diversity of Opinions. For if Subscription to Creeds and Forms of Orthodoxy was once laid aside, if the Doors of the Church were set wide open, and all that would, only owning the Scriptures to be the Word of God, might be admitted to her Ministry, that glorious Confusion Infidels pant after would come on a-pace; and Christianity, without their Help, would be soon writ and preach'd out of the World. Every Parish might have a System of Divinity peculiar to itself, nay, there might be divers in the same Parish: The Doctor, in the Morning, would teach his People *Orthodoxy*, and the Afternoon Preacher give them a Lecture of rank *Arianism*. The next Lord's Day a Disciple of *Socinus* finds Means to get into the Pulpit, and undertakes to confute both; and then, one after another, twenty Species besides of Hereticks or Enthusiasts, for whom, at present, we have no Names, shall mount it, to give Vent to some Peculiarities of their own. This is the blessed State of Religion, which a promiscuous and undistinguishing Admittance into the sacred Ministry of all Persons, who still believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God, would introduce. Great Joy for Infidels and Libertines! It might, possibly, bring some of these Folks, now and then, to Church (as they go to the Bear-Garden) meerly for Sport and Pastime. But those who are serious would have no Heart to go thither, and might think it better to stay at Home, mourn in Secret, and try to discover what is *true Religion and undefiled before God*, in their own Closets. And Men of weak Judgments would be in Danger of turning
Scepticks,

Scepticks, or of going over to downright Infidelity. This indeed might not immediately be the Case, tho' all Subscriptions were to be *now* removed. For the present Clergy, 'tis like, and I do believe, would be, in general, the same Men that they are *now*. But when *these* are gone off the Stage, and succeeded by others, who may differ, perhaps, as much in their Principles and Beliefs, as they do in their Countenances, then is the Time we may expect to taste the Fruits of this hopeful Scheme of Liberty.

I have not complimented, I hope, the present Clergy above what they deserve. For tho' it is said, some of them do indulge themselves in an unwarrantable Latitude of thinking, and have fallen away from the Catholick Faith which they have formerly subscribed to, I am persuaded there are not many of this Sort. Such as there are, 'tis like, if all Forms of Subscription that stand in their way, were removed, would, by Degrees, throw off their Disguises, and shew themselves, in their publick Administrations and Instructions, quite other Sort of Men, than they may now, possibly, appear to be. But as Things are at present, they will not commonly take the Boldness, in the Face of their Parishes, and in open Contradiction to their recorded Subscriptions, (which they may, and, perhaps, hope, they shall have Occasion to repeat) and to those Forms which they are daily using, to oppose the received Faith. At least, they will hardly do it by *express Negatives*, by *open avowed Attacks*, but only by *dark and doubling Expressions*, *distant Innuendos*, and *consequential Arguments*, which, as they will pass unobserved by Nineteen in Twenty of their Hearers, will not give that great and general Offence I have been just before representing. This was the Way of a late learned Doctor in his Sermons. *There are many Sentences scat-*

tered throughout, setting forth, or implying *Arianism*, as his *Right Reverend* Editor observes. But had it not been for Creeds and certain Forms of Prayer he was muzzled with, instead of *Sentences scattered*, up and down, *implying Arianism*, we should have had, in all likelihood, *Arianism professed*, and he would have been, in his Discourses from the Pulpit, as unreserved, as he is in his *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, and other Writings. In fine, if ever these Checks and Restraints shall be taken off, such Offences will come oftener from the Pulpit, and grow, gradually, more and greater, as the present Clergy wear away; and the Press, in concert with the Pulpit, will daily groan with new and strange Doctrines, as it has done, of late, with Harangues against Creeds, and Subscription to them.

There is Reason to believe a great Part of these have flowed from the Pens of *Dissenters*; and some doubtless have come from the *Infidel* Quarter. I am ready to do many Dissenters the Justice to own, that as they hold to sound and Catholick Principles, in Opposition to the Heresies now prevailing, so they are no *Enemies* to, but have been good *Advocates* for Creeds and Subscriptions to them against their own Brethren. But if we believe the Gentlemen of this latter Sort, subscribing the Doctrines of *Christianity* in any form of Words of Man's devising, is *discrediting the Perfection of the Holy Scriptures*, and *throwing Dirt upon them*, *undermining the Principles of the Reformation*, and *laying the Foundation of Popery*, an *Encroachment upon Christian Liberty*, *encouraging Impositions*, *setting up a Tyrannical Power*, and even an *Inquisition in the Church*, nor can Truth and Peace be preserved (as one or two of them wildly say) 'till this *Engine of the Devil be overthrown*. This, and a great deal more

more in the like Strain, may be found in the Writings of Non-Subscribers, with which the World swarmed somewhat above twenty Years ago, during the famous Controversy about the Trinity. And the Non-Subscribers, unless I am greatly mistaken, were a good Majority of the *London* Ministers. Whether they were, before that Time, of these Principles, or took them up, *as convenient at that critical Juncture*, to screen themselves from any further Enquiry into their Faith, which might have ended in their being deprived of their publick Ministerial Usefulness, their Brethren *for* the Subscription, must be allowed to be the best Judges. But I, who know them no otherwise than by such of their Writings as have happened to fall into my Hands, am willing to embrace the former Opinion, as the most charitable, *viz.* that these, all along, were their settled Principles, and that they writ, at that Time, no otherwise of these Matters, than they were always used to think of them.

Who, now, would think any other, than that *these Gentlemen* ordain *their* Ministers, without asking any Questions about their Opinions and Beliefs? Who would not suppose, that they take in *all*, whatever Principles they are known to be of, or tho' nothing of their Principles be known more than this, that they are *Christians*? If I were to take it into *my* Head to become a Pastor to one of their Congregations, where my Principles were well known, might not I fairly expect not to be rejected, on those Accounts? And yet, if I should reckon upon *that*, I am afraid I should soon find I had reckoned wrong, and flattered myself too much. It runs strangely in my Head, I should stand but a bad Chance, and find it an up-hill Business to mount one of their Pulpits, with the Weight of all my *Liturgical, Prelatical, Catholick* Principles about me.

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And if another was to offer himself to them, but, at the same Time, was resolved to keep his Principles to himself, and let them know of him no more than that he believed the Bible to be the Word of God, and all it contains to be true, could he reasonably suppose he should *not* be accepted? and yet I fancy he must *open* himself a little more than this comes to, before the Doors of the Meeting will be *open* to *him*. They will certainly demand, and he must give them, before he is admitted, some farther Proof and Evidence of his Orthodoxy. And if an *innocent Error* about the *Trinity* or *Incarnation* should chance to be no Bar to his Preferment, nor make him less acceptable to the People, yet there are other Points of more favourite Importance, wherein it will be expected he should be found *orthodox*. He must be an *Arminian*, to please some; an *Anti-Arminian*, and very staunch in the five Points, to be accepted of others. And I have been informed of a Congregation who were used to be called Presbyterians, the Heads of which, upon losing their Minister, who, it seems, for being an *Arminian*, had not been very acceptable to them, said among themselves — *They must now have an Independent, for the Presbyterians were not sound.*

Supposing, however, he gets in, and fancying himself well settled in his Congregation, begins to publish, either in Print, or Preaching, or Conversation, some Opinions that are distasteful to them; in such a Case, 'tis a Chance, if they are not for trying to eject him, and put another in his Place who shall come up to their own Standard; and some of the Orthodox Ministers in the Neighbourhood shall be called in to give a Sanction to their doings. We hear, at every Turn, of some Cases of this sort, and are often obliged with *Faithful Narratives* thereof.

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That they are not such Enemies to all *inquisitory Forms of Tryals*, as, from some of their Writings, they may seem to be, is pretty evident from the Care that is previously taken to be rightly informed of the Faith and Principles of their Candidates for the Ministry. It should seem, by some Passages I have met with in their Writings, that these are regularly examined, not only as to their Learning, but to their Soundness also in the Faith. And Doctor Calamy, in his *short Account of Protestant Dissenters in England*, tells us, *they make, before they are solemnly ordained, a publick Confession of that Faith in which they engage to make it their Business to instruct others.* And this Confession of their Faith we often see accompany the Ordination Sermon, when it is published. I don't mightily like the Way. For, in these Forms, many Points of the greatest Importance *may* be omitted, and, probably, *often are.* And they *may* be drawn up in such general, such sliding, evasive, and equivocating Terms, as shall impose upon the Congregation, and the Ordainer too, at only one hearing. And that this is not a mere Fancy and groundless Suggestion, appears from a Book, intitled, *An Answer to Mr. Pierce's Western Inquisition*, p. 27, 28, 40. where we are told of no less than five or six Gentlemen, all mentioned by Name, *who seeming very sound as to the Doctrine of the Trinity, in the Confessions they made, at their Ordinations, afterwards appeared of different Sentiments, to the great Grief of several of their Ordainers, and that this Practise of Equivocation has been the Cause of most of the Trouble and Difficulty that the Ministers have laboured under.* By this we may plainly see, that their Method to prove the Faith of their Ministers is not so wise and effectual to answer the End, as Subscription to certain and well known Forms. But be
that

that as it will; for that is not the Point I am now upon: But I am only observing, that they do impose, upon all Persons to be Ordained, this Test of their Faith and Orthodoxy. I ask now, Are not these Confessions of Faith *Human Explications*? Are they not *Forms of Mens devising*? Are they *expressed in the Words of Scripture, and in them only*? Every body sees they are not. Do they not contain many Points, besides the Scriptures being written by Inspiration of God? And is there any Difference (I mean as to the Iniquity of the Thing) between giving in, or pronouncing publickly a Confession of their Faith of their own composing, or, possibly, transcribed from others, and subscribing to one offered by the Church? If there be, pray tell me, wherein lies the Innocency of the one, and wherein the Iniquity of the other?

There is one Gentleman of great Name among the Dissenters, and he is Mr. *Candler*, who seems to have the most frightful Notions of Subscription of any Writer I have yet met with. In his Account, it is not only an *unreasonable Thing*, but *pernicious to the Church of God, infamous in its Nature, unjust, Antichristian*, and almost every thing that is bad. Now I would enquire, if he has never been concerned in the Ordination of any; and if he has, whether he did not exact such Confessions of the Ordained, but laid Hands on them, *suddenly*, upon their making only a *general Declaration of their believing the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and consenting to the Doctrine of Christ, as therein delivered*. I would enquire too, if he himself did not make such a Confession of *his* Faith, when *he* was ordained. I have Reason to think he did; because I find Dr. *Calamy*, who says, as before mentioned, *their young Men who are Candidates for the Ministry, before they are ordained, make a*
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Confession of their Faith, was the Ordainer of Mr. S. Chandler, whom I suppose to be the Gentleman I am now writing of. And he, to be sure, would not neglect what he says was the constant Practice of their Churches. And indeed I observe that the Doctor, in the Charge delivered to him, takes Notice, *that he had taken of him all fitting Precautions, as to his future Conduct, by certain Promises he made about a few necessary Things.* Here we have Mr. Chandler engaging himself, by certain Promises about some necessary Things, besides (I presume) the Scriptures being the Word of God, at his entring upon the Ministry, and to qualify himself for it. And 'tis Pity those Promises, and these necessary Things were not made publick, that we might have known what they were, how few, how many, and how necessary, which, in all likelihood, would have shewn, in a strong Light, the Inconsistency of this Gentleman's avowed Principles with his Practice.

So then, upon the whole of the Matter, they, too, with all their Pretences to Liberty, have an *Inquisition* of their own, (for so, I think, they have christned all Forms of Tryal concerning the Faith of Ministers) and which all of them, Subscribers and Non-Subscribers, so far as appears, have agreed to submit to, in order to explore the Consciences, to sift out the Faith of all Aspirants to the Ministry, and be secure of it.

But they not only exact ' Confessions of Faith
(which

^t They not only exact Confessions of Faith of their Candidates for the Ministry, but something of that Sort of all Communicants, unless Mr. Dorrington, who *should know* what their Practices are, has misinformed us. He says, They require of them who come to the Lord's Supper a Confession of their Faith, which must be given to the Pastor at least, and perhaps before some of the ruling Elders of the Church. So that, as great Enemies as they would seem to be to all Tests of Orthodoxy, when in their ill Humour they are writing against the Establish'd Church for imposing

(which are all one with Subscriptions, saving only in Point of external Form) from their Ministers, at their Ordination, but, in Obedience to the Laws, do actually subscribe the Articles, just as we do, to qualify themselves for officiating in any Congregation for the Exercise of Religion. This, I dare say, is not generally known. It is commonly supposed that the Creeds and Articles of the Church of *England* are subscribed only by the Clergy of the Church of *England*. But be it known to all the People of *Great-Britain*, that there is not, in the Kingdom, one Dissenting Minister, who has complied with the Terms of the Toleration, but has solemnly subscribed the Articles, bating three or four, which they are excused from subscribing, by reason the subject Matter of them is contrary to the profest Principles of Dissenters, and has also subscribed the three Creeds, (yes, the *Athanasian*, as well as the other) *that they ought thoroughly to be received, and believed, and may be proved by most certain Warrants of Holy Scripture.* The Act of Toleration (I have put in the ^v Margin the enacting Clause) expressly requires

imposing them, their own very Laity are not exempt from them.

^v And be it farther enacted, by the Authority aforesaid, That no Person Dissenting from the Church of *England* in holy Orders, or pretending to holy Orders, nor any Preacher or Teacher of any Congregation of Dissenting Protestants that shall make and subscribe the Declaration aforesaid, and take the said Oaths at the General or Quarter Sessions of the Peace to be held for the County, Town, Parts or Division where such Person lives, which Court is hereby impowered to administer the same, and shall also declare his Approbation of and subscribe the Articles of Religion mentioned in the Statute made in the 13th Year of the Reign of the late Queen *Elizabeth*, except the 34th, 35th, and 36th, and these Words of the 20th Article, *viz.* ["The Church has Power to decree Rites and Ceremonies and Authority in Controversies of Faith, and yet"] shall be liable to any of the Pains or Penalties mentioned in an Act made the 17th Year of the Reign of King
Charles

requires of *them* such Subscription, as a Condition of their being exempted from the Pains and Penalties of some former Acts; and they do, it is to be supposed, as the Law requires. And yet these Gentlemen, all the while, are writing, with as much Freedom; or with as noble and generous a Warmth, as they, doubtless, will call it, against Subscription, as if *they* were under no manner of Obligation to subscribe, and did nothing at all of that Nature.

They say, and ^w Mr. *Chandler*, in particular, says, *Subscriptions have ever been a Grievance in the Church of God*. And, doubtless, the making a Confession of their Faith, at their Ordinations, just in the Manner that they now, of themselves, do, would have been, too, a *Grievance*, if it had been required by Law. But is it not an Iniquity, too, in his, and their Judgments? A *mere* Grievance *may*, and *ought*, in some Cases, to be submitted to. But will they submit to a confessed Iniquity? Why, really they do. In their *Reasons*

Charles the 2d entitled, "An Act for restraining Non Conformists from inhabiting in Corporations," nor the Penalties mentioned in the aforesaid Act made in the two and twentieth Year of his said late Majesty's Reign, or by Reason of such Persons preaching at any Meeting for the Exercise of Religion; nor to the Penalty of One hundred Pounds mentioned in an Act made in the 13th and 14th of King *Charles* the second, entitled, "An Act for the Uniformity of publick Prayers and Administration of Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies; and for establishing the Form of making, ordaining, and consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons in the Church of *England*," for officiating in any Congregation for the Exercise of Religion permitted and allowed by this Act.

Provided always, that the making and subscribing the said Declaration and taking the said Oaths, and making the Declaration of Approbation and Subscription to the said Articles, in manner as aforesaid, by every respective Person, or Persons herein before-mentioned, at such General or Quarter Sessions of the Peace, as aforesaid, shall be then and there entered of Record at the said Court, &c. &c.

^w *History of Persecution*, p. 428.

for not subscribing the Paper offered at *Salter's-Hall*, they say, *The Subscription there insisted on is beyond even what the Legislature itself requires of us. For the Legislature has thought fit to require only our once subscribing; and this being made a necessary Condition of exercising our Ministry, we should be highly blameable to neglect that Work, by refusing to comply with what is required of us, when we can do it with a safe Conscience. But we have always thought that human Declarations of Faith were far from being eligible, on their own Account. And in a Post-script to their Advices, they farther say, In some Points, and in some Cases, we may, no doubt, submit to legal Demands, when yet we ought, by no means, to countenance it, where there is no Presence of Authority. Here indeed, where they are speaking of their own Subscribing to our Articles of Religion, they speak somewhat tenderly against Subscription. 'Tis only said of it, that 'tis far from being eligible on its own Account, and what ought, by no means, to be countenanced; which, yet, plainly, imports, that they esteem it a wrong and unwarrantable thing. But at other Times, when their subscribing is not thought of, or there is no Occasion to make mention of it, they run riot upon it, representing it (as I before observed) as a giving up of their Christian Liberty, throwing Dirt upon the Scriptures, and sapping the Foundations of the Reformation. Yet, all this, it seems, they can do with a safe Conscience, when Law and Authority require it, and they can't exercise their Ministry without it. Nay, they should think themselves highly blameable, if they were to refuse it. These Principles, methinks, would as well justify or excuse their Ministerial Conformity to the Church of England. For, in that Case, it would be only saying, that, "tho' subscribing the Liturgy, and*
" doing

“ doing some other Things as necessary Conditions
 “ of exercising our Ministry are far from being
 “ eligible on their own Accounts, and ought, by all
 “ Means, to be discountenanced, yet, as they are
 “ legally demanded, they may be complied with,
 “ with a safe Conscience, and we should be highly
 “ blameable to neglect the Work of the Ministry, by
 “ refusing to comply with what is required of us.”

These are your sound and judicious Casuists! These your consistent Protestants! These your Friends of Liberty! Strange! that Gentlemen, who, in other Cases are so fond of Liberty, as to declare, they will not submit to any Terms of Communion that are *legally demanded*, and hold it sinful to comply with such Things as they own to be *indifferent* in their Natures, *because they are imposed by Authority*, should, in this Case, comply with what they declare to be *unjustifiable*, and *infamous* in its Nature, *because Authority imposes it*.

Quo teneam vultus mutantem Protea nodo?

’Tis true, this is done to preserve their supposed Usefulness, and *that good may come on’t*. But this will sound strangely in all Christian and Protestant Ears. And therefore, ’tis hoped, if they can’t alter their Principles, they will their Practices, and if they continue of Opinion, that subscribing is such an unwarrantable Thing, they will openly refuse it. But if they can’t be brought to do *that*, the next wisest Thing they can do is, to *subscribe and hold their Tongues*, and say not a Syllable about it.

This writing against Subscription with Subscribing at the same Time, appears to me a most surprising Procedure. It is a perfect Riddle; and one knows not how to unfold it, unless it can be done by the Supposition of a *double Doctrine*, a *vulgar* and a *secret* Theology, the former to be *delivered*

out among the People, the latter to be *kept in* for the Use and Instruction of a select Number, such as are initiated into their Mysteries. And as the ancient Sages (unless Mr. *Warburton* be mistaken) used to inculcate upon the People certain Principles and Doctrines which they did not believe themselves, *for their Utility*, because they were necessary to support a Civil Establishment, so *these*, it may be thought, scatter Prejudices among our People against Subscription for their Tendency to *overthrow* a Religious one, all the while keeping up a regard to them *among themselves*, that so, they may preserve some tolerable Order, Unity, and Purity in their own Churches. If this be their Policy, 'tis certainly right, and I cannot but commend them for being so *wise in their Generations*. For the Exemption of the Clergy from all Obligation to subscribe (if they could but prevail to obtain it for us) would be as proper an Engine as can ever be employed for the Subversion of the Establish'd Church, which seems to have been *the Thing in View*, for some past Years.

I shall dismiss this Subject, after remarking one or two Things concerning the Conduct of the Gentleman before mentioned, in his *History of Persecution*, in regard to the Cause now before us. In that Book he has thought fit to bestow a whole Chapter (which he seems to think no Digression from his Subject) against Subscription. But all the Way, speaks of it as a slavish and corrupt Practice, which the Church and her Clergy alone had any Concern in. *The Clergy* (says he p. 432.) *of the Church of England are bound to subscribe the XXXIX Articles*. Is there any Difference between subscribing XXXIX and XXXV Articles and a Half, as all the Dissenting Ministers are obliged to do? But not a single Syllable is said, nor the least

Hint

Hint given, here or elsewhere, that I can find, of *that*. And so, all the Imputations he was about fastening upon Subscription were to fall, in their full Weight, upon the Church only. Is it possible to think that a Gentleman of his confessed Acuteness and Capacity could write a Chapter against Subscription, of twelve or thirteen Pages, (besides what he has scattered, up and down, in his Book) without calling to Mind, that he and his Brethren were concerned, as well as we, in this Affair of Subscription, and as much interested in the Defence and Justification of it? If the Reader is so charitably disposed as to think he *might*, and probably *did* do so, I am content. But for my own Part, as I should be loth to be found deficient in *real* Charity, so I would not be willingly remarked for a *fulsome Affectation* of it; and, therefore, make no Difficulty to declare, that, to me, it does not seem likely, that *such a Man* as Mr. *Candler*, who seems (it must be said) pretty much awake, whenever he sets Pen to Paper, should be so very unreflecting, as not once, from Beginning to End, to call it to remembrance, that he, and his Brethren were Subscribers, as well as we. I should rather think it would be continually running in his Head, and he would not know how to get it out.

Then again, not content with loading the Clergy with the Charge of *mere* subscribing, (which, in his Opinion, is heavy enough) he *will* have it, that their Subscriptions are *fraudulent* and *evasive*: *It must be*, (he says Pag. 435.) *by some such Evasions* (as he had before mentioned) *that Arians subscribe to Athanasian Creeds, and Arminians to Principles of rigid Calvinism. This the Clergy have been, again and again, reproached with, even by the Enemies of Christianity.* Yes, we know it, the Enemies of *Christianity* and the Writers on the Dissenting Side
have

have commonly, of late Days, joined together, in their Reproaches and Praises of the same Persons. *And I am sorry to say it* (continues he) *they have not been able to wipe off the Scandal from themselves.* Did he not now know, or did he forget, or, I ask again, would he have had it been concealed, that the Dissenting Ministers, *who are all Subscribers*, are, some of them, *Arians* (more, I dare say, in Proportion) and many of them *Arminians* (if they must be so called) as well as our Clergy? And have they been able to wipe off the Reproach of Subscribing *Athanasian* (as he, with Mr. Whiston loves to call them, instead of *Catholic*) Principles, and rigid *Calvinistic* ones, if indeed our Articles were such? In another Place, p. 69. he asks, *Do all the Clergy really believe that the Fault and Corruption of the Nature of every Man does in every Person born into the World deserve God's Wrath and Damnation, that we have no Power to do good Works acceptable to God, without the Grace of God by Christ preventing us; that Works done without the Inspiration of the Spirit are not pleasant to God, yea, that they have the Nature of Sin.* Or rather, *do not the Generality of those who subscribe them, if they put any Sense upon them at all, draw them a little aside, and put their own Comment upon them?*—Not that he knows; or, if they do, the Dissenting Ministers may be supposed to do the same. For he and every body knows, these are no distinguishing Points between Churchmen and Dissenters, and the one is as like as the other to be dissatisfied about them. And that Mr. Chandler knows one Dissenter, at least, who really is so, and when he subscribed them, *if he put any Sense at all upon them, drew them a little aside, and put his own Comment upon them,* we have pretty good Evidence in this Place.

After all, considering the heavy Charges brought
by

by this Gentleman, and so many of his Brethren, against Subscription, it is almost uncharitable to suppose that they *do* subscribe, as by Law they are bound to do, and one would really suspect, that they *neglect* or *evade* it, and take the Benefit of the Toleration, without complying with the most essential Condition of it.—But this is a Subject too nice and delicate for my handling : And, therefore, *here* I resolve to break off, leaving the intelligent Reader for the rest to his own Reflections.

F I N I S.



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